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H.M.S. "Iron Duke," Super-Dreadnought (Flagship of Admiral Sir John R. Jellicoe).

for Lytton
N. one to witness for 4 May 1919

GENERAL FRENCH
and
ADMIRAL JELlicoe

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TO

THE BRAVE SOULS

WHO, TO MAINTAIN NATIONAL HONOUR, TRUTH,
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR 'A SCRAP OF PAPER,'
HAVE GIVEN UP THE COMFORTABLE EASE OF
PEACE FOR THE FORTUNES OF WAR IN AIR, ON
LAND, AND ON THE SEA.

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Army, and probably he himself values just as highly as any other glowing panegyric that has ever been made upon his military prowess by the orators of his day, the striking testimonial penned from the South African veld during the last Boer War by a non-commissioned officer of a regiment of irregular scouts then serving under him : 'I thank God for General French, for he has a heart as well as a head, and he possesses some regard for human life.'

A man who finds one of his greatest delights in puzzling out some intricate tactical movement required by the exigencies of the battlefield, but who yet finds time, after a stressful day of combating the enemy's fierce onslaughts in engagements of international moment, to visit the field hospital and speak a kindly word of cheer and encouragement to his men, Sir John French has been thus admirably word-sketched : 'In character he is a man of cold persistence, and of fiery energy, cautious, yet audacious, weighing his actions well, but carrying them out with the dash that befits a leader. He is remarkable for the quickness of his decision, being alert,

resourceful, and determined.' His tenets as a leader of men are far enough removed from those of the 'blood and iron' school upon which the German Army has plumed itself and has built up its ruthless policy of all-crushing militarism.

Ready with the mailed fist to strike the enemy whenever the occasion may arise, he is yet himself an excellent example of his own summing up of a great general's genius: 'I believe I am right when I say that not a few of the greatest military commanders the world has known have been distinguished by a certain grand simplicity of character. Indeed, this quality seems, if not essential, at any rate of very great value to a military commander, because it is most likely to mean fixity and singleness of mind and purpose, of power of concentration, and of wise direction of thought.'

General French comes of a fighting stock. The family is of Franco-Irish extraction, and proudly claims relationship with Lord de Freyne. For some generations the Frenches were settled in Roscommon, from which county Sir John's grandfather migrated to

the pretty little English village of Ripple Vale, near Walmer, in Kent.

Burke's *Peerage* traces the family tree as far back as the sixteenth century to one Stephen French, whose son Patrick was a burgess of the town of Galway. Patrick was the grandfather of John French of French Park, popularly called Tierna More, or the great landowner. That worthy gentleman fought in the army of King William, and commanded a troop in the Enniskillen Dragoons at the Battle of Aughrim. He died at an advanced age in 1734, leaving the considerable sum of £1000 to be spent upon his funeral, which must have been a remarkable affair. His body was laid in state in the Park for three days and nights, and the county was feasted round it. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Arthur, an ancestor of Lord de Freyne.

Ripple Vale, County Kent, became the family estate through the present Sir John's great-grandfather.

It is rather a remarkable coincidence that both the present Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, and his General Commanding-

in-Chief on the European battle-field have Irish blood in their veins. The Emerald Isle has always been strangely linked up with the military campaigns of Great Britain, and her two distinguished sons to whom to-day are entrusted the fortunes of her land forces fought successfully side by side in the last important war in the campaign in South Africa. But then, the Irishman is a born fighter; and already on the Continent, in India, and, as has been said, in Africa, his name is inextricably mixed up with the history of the fight for the British flag.

Stern when necessary, silent if the occasion demands, dour in determination, plucky in perseverance, merry and bright in the face of circumstances that might well tend to overwhelm the stoutest of hearts, the Hibernian vein in the leaders of to-day, just as in the case of Wellington, is stoutly patriotic and strongly heroic, and strengthens the other admirable characteristics that go to make the British people a great nation, having and holding that 'vaster Empire than has been' upon which the sun never sets.

John Denton Pinkstone French was born at Ripple Vale on September 28, 1852. His father was Captain John Tracy William French, J.P., D.L., who was born in 1808, and married in 1842 Margaret, daughter of William Eccles, a prosperous Glasgow merchant whose business was that of West India planter and merchant. He became a commander in the Royal Navy in 1847. Captain French, R.N., died at Nice on 10th February, 1855, leaving one son and five daughters, one of the latter being the famous suffragist leader, Mrs Charlotte Despard.

General French derived the surname Pinkstone from the estate of Pinkstone, Cumbernauld, in Dumbartonshire, thirteen miles to the east of Glasgow, which, according to Lord Newlands, belonged to many generations of Pinkstones. His father owned it, and Sir John French succeeded to it, later parting with the property. There is the authority of Mr Stewart Smith, of Glasgow, a cousin and old schoolfellow of Sir John, for the statement that, on the death of Captain and Mrs French, Mr Smith's father, Mr William Smith of Lancefield, acted as guardian to the family,

though Sir John and his sisters never lived in the Second City.

In 1880 General French married Eleonora Anna, second daughter of the late Richard William Selby Lowndes, of Elmers, Bletchley, J.P. Of their family of three sons and two daughters, two sons and a daughter survive. The family were: John Richard Lowndes, born on 6th July, 1881; Mary Eleonora Marguerite, born on 29th September, 1882, died on 21st December of the same year; Edward Gerald Fleming, born on 11th December, 1883, married in 1906 Leila King, now residing at Sandakan, British North Borneo; Essex Eleonora, born on 11th July, 1886; and Aubrey Arthur Charles, born on 11th November, 1887, died on 27th January, 1889.

Sir John French's parents died when he was quite a small boy, and he spent most of his early days in North London. He received a sound preliminary education at preparatory schools at Harrow and Portsmouth, where his smartness and aptitude as a pupil marked him out as a youth of considerable promise.

Though troubled somewhat with nervousness as a lad—in the light of his subsequent history it seems almost nonsensical to suggest that a man of such iron nerve and indomitable courage should ever have known what ‘nerves’ are, but it is a fact all the same—he exhibited an all-absorbing passion for warfare. True, at some stage or another of a boy’s career, the battle-field appears as the acme of life, but young French had the soldier-worship fever particularly badly, and for hours on end would read with the utmost curiosity books and any other publications that came to hand dealing with warfare in its manifold aspects. Like many another boy, his particular hero was Napoleon Bonaparte.

The great Duke of Wellington had been laid to rest two months after the boy’s birth, and the next year the Crimean War broke out, to be followed almost immediately afterwards by the Indian Mutiny. Thus the childhood and boyhood of the future soldier were spent, so to say, in the very atmosphere of war. This, coupled with the blood of a fighting ancestry in his veins, made it only natural, therefore, that he should choose a career of

arms when the time came for the consideration of his future.

It was to train for the sister service to that in which he has made such a great name for himself that young John French first decided. Accordingly, in 1866, he joined H.M.S. *Britannia*, the naval training ship for officers, and served as a cadet and midshipman in the Royal Navy for four years. However, he did not take to the sea of his own choice, and soon grew tired of the naval service, in which, to him, there seemed to be but little scope for his tastes and ambitions.

Thus it was that, after only four years' naval life, he turned his attention to the army, into which he gained an entrance through the medium of the militia from the Suffolk Artillery. Fortunately for his country in the wars into which she subsequently found herself dragged, he chose a cavalry regiment. His career as a soldier, indeed, is an effective refutation of the gibe of former days regarding 'a sailor on horseback.' It was on 28th February, 1874, that he was gazetted as a lieutenant in the 8th Hussars. He did not remain in that regiment very long. The

following month he transferred to the 19th Hussars.

‘Why,’ jestingly remarked one of the Hussars subalterns when young French forsook the navy for the army, ‘he looks like a soda water bottle!’ And Soda Water Bottle French the new Hussar was always afterwards called by his fellow officers. It was only a joke, of course, for, through his willingness to learn and his anxiety to do all that he could for his regiment, he rapidly won the help and esteem of his commanding-officer, Colonel Barrow, who encouraged him in his military studies and to whose kindly advice and guidance General French doubtless owes not a little of his success as a soldier and a leader of armed hosts.

As has been indicated, Lieutenant French threw himself heart and soul into the work of the soldier. There was nothing too trivial for him to know, and he made it his business to study intimately all the intricate details that help to make the vast conglomeration of men and machinery known as the British Army work smoothly and successfully. His good work frequently came under the eye of

his superior officers, who noted with peculiar satisfaction his eagerness to assimilate all the knowledge he could gain. He had a wonderfully retentive memory, and never required to be told the same thing twice.

It was little wonder, then, that promotion at this period of his career came to him rapidly. For six months in 1880 he was called upon to perform the duties of Adjutant to his regiment, which he did with complete satisfaction to all concerned. On the 16th October of that year he was gazetted as Captain, and in April following he was appointed Adjutant to the Northumberland Yeomanry. He attained the rank of Major on the 3rd April, 1883.

CHAPTER II

THE MAHDI

IN the beginning of 1884 the British Government had to face the probability of an attempted invasion of Egypt by the Mahdi, who seemed to be inspired by a similar idea of world-conquest to that which animates

Germany to-day. 'If you live long enough,' said the amiable gentleman of Egypt to an interviewer at the time, 'you will see the troops of the Mahdi spreading over Europe, Rome, and Constantinople, after which there will be nothing left for you but hell and damnation.'

The son of a Dongola carpenter, Mohammed Achmet Shemsedden, the Mahdi studied religion in the free school of a Khartoum dervish, who himself claimed descent from the Prophet. According to General Stewart, his fame and sanctity spread far and wide, and Mohammed Achmet became wealthy, collected disciples, and married several wives, all of whom he was careful to select from among the daughters of the most influential Sheikhs and other notables.

About the end of May, 1881, he began to teach that he was the Mahdi foretold by Mohammed, and that he had a divine mission to reform Islam, to establish a universal equality and community of goods, and that all who did not believe him should be destroyed, be they Christian, Mohammedan; or Pagan. 'Judging from his conduct of affairs and

policy,' says General Stewart, 'I should say he had considerable natural ability. The manner in which he has managed to merge the usually discordant tribes together, denotes great tact. He had probably been preparing the movement for some time back.'

At the end of 1883, when the Government of the Khedive of Egypt had been restored, the British Army of occupation comprised the 19th Hussars; G Battery, B Brigade Royal Artillery; 1st Battery 1st Brigade Scottish Division of Garrison Artillery; 2nd Battalion 46th (Duke of Cornwall's) Regiment; 1st Battalion 35th (Royal Sussex) Regiment; 1st Battalion (Black Watch) Royal Highlanders; 3rd Battalion 60th King's Own Rifles; 1st Battalion 75th Gordon Highlanders; and 79th Cameron Highlanders. When the rumours of further trouble began to arise, the British forces in Egypt numbered 6367 all told.

After the fall of Sinkat and Tokar, Osman Digna kept up the spirits of his followers to the highest pitch by frequently telling them that the Madhi himself would soon be among them. There was no doubt that the victory

over Baker Pasha's army greatly added to the Madhi's prestige all over the Sudan and largely increased the number of his followers. In any case, matters in Egypt began to look much more serious afterwards.

On 12th February, 1884, Lord Wolseley created some sensation by despatching the following message to the General Commanding the Forces in Egypt :—

‘The forces to collect at Suakin with the object of relieving the Tokar division, if it can hold out; if not, of taking any measures necessary for the defence of ports. General Graham to command the forces. Redvers Buller to command the Infantry Brigade and be second in command. Herbert Stewart to command all mounted troops. The two last-named and Wauchope, deputed assistant-general, to start to-night. Select other staff officers as required immediately. Make arrangements at once, settling all details yourself.

‘Select the three best battalions in your command, and the 2nd Fusiliers now in the *Jumna*, and the battalion of Marines, to form the infantry Brigade under Buller. If you deem it advisable bring the garrison of

Alexandria to Cairo while the expedition lasts. Report if you wish to do so, as orders would be sent to the fleet to hold Alexandria temporarily. Whilst so held, a naval officer will command there. The 19th Hussars, 19th Infantry, and any reliable native horsemen now at Suakin to constitute the native force under Stewart. Complete the 19th from country horses, leaving behind for a time the British horses with the Egyptian cavalry.

‘One garrison battery of the Royal Artillery to take over guns, equipment, camels, and camel-drivers from Wood’s Camel Battery. If it has started from Cairo it must be started back at once for this purpose. It can take the ordinary field guns with it up the Nile. Send one of its officers with the camel-drivers. Baring will give the necessary authority.

‘Admiral Hewett will furnish machine guns, manned with sailors, if required. Do not send field guns on any account with the expedition. Regimental transport to be taken with the troops. Employ camels as much as possible. The baggage to be on the lowest scale, as the troops ought to be back in Cairo

in three weeks. Obtain from the Egyptian Government means for carrying water on camels.

‘Turn your best attention to the carriage of water. Stretchers of three or four per company, and make best arrangements you can for the conveyance of the wounded. Tents to accompany the force to Suaki or Trinkitat, as the case may be. The troops to bivouac on the line of march. Provisions for men and horses for a fortnight to be embarked. Arrange for sending more on afterwards for one or two more weeks.

‘The naval authorities may be indented on for first needs to be landed from the ships. All sea transports to be arranged with the naval authorities. Three months’ supply of groceries for 6000 men, and a reserve of 180,000 lb. of preserved meat, and 400 tons of forage will be shipped from Britain immediately. You will telegraph any further arrangements. Send your best doctor as principal medical officer. Two hundred and fifty rounds per man, besides seventy in pouch, and furnish every man with an ample puggaree.

‘The 10th Hussars from the *Jumna* will be landed to protect Suakin, and a few of them might be mounted, as it is desirable to be strong in cavalry. Order all good horses now there to remain for this purpose, and tell Parr to do his best to obtain land transport. The naval officer commanding at Alexandria to arrange for conveyance from Suez to Suakin. Communicate with him at once. Two medical and two commissariat officers will start at once for service in your command. All confidence is felt in your judgment and experience to settle all necessary details.’

The entire Expeditionary Force under General Graham in the advance upon El Teb from Fort Baker consisted of: Cavalry 785—10th Hussars, 328; 19th Hussars, 457; Mounted Infantry, 136; Artillery, 126; with six seven-pounder guns, ten brass mountain guns, and four nine-centimetre Krupp guns. Naval, 785—62 men with two nine-pounder guns, three gatling guns, and three Gardner guns, under Commander Rolfe of H.M.S. *Euryalus*, and Flag-Lieutenant Graham. First Brigade: The King’s Royal Rifle Corps, 610; the Gordon Highlanders, 751; and the Royal

Irish Rifles, 334. Second Brigade: The Black Watch (Royal Highlanders), 761; the Royal Marine Light Infantry and the Royal Marine Artillery, 361; Engineers, 100; details, 200.

The Expeditionary Force to relieve Tokar was formed of the 19th Hussars, under Colonel A. Webster; 3rd Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps, under Colonel Ogilvie; 1st Battalion Royal Highlanders (Black Watch), under Colonels Green and Bayley; 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders, under Colonel Daniell. The total personnel was about 2500.

General Gordon meanwhile had arrived safely at Khartoum on 18th February. Some time previously Gordon had been sent out to the Sudan to quell the Mahdists. Gordon, however, got locked up at Khartoum. The Nile Expedition was designed to relieve the famous Briton, and, incidentally, it brought Major French his first chance of distinction upon the field of battle. The young officer served with his own regiment, the 19th Hussars, and the opportunities which came his way, and which were promptly seized, gained for him a great name as a cavalry officer of

resourcefulness and prompt action. We have it on the authority of that veteran campaigner, Sir Evelyn Wood, that throughout the expedition 'Major French was always alert, bright, and cheerful;' and the young officer's services during those trying days brought him also prominently under the special attention of Lord Wolseley and Sir Redvers Buller.

The arrival of the 19th Hussars in Egypt was marked by rather an unfortunate mishap. The cavalry were being conveyed to their destination on the transport *Neera*, which, while she was yet nineteen miles from Suakin, grounded on a reef. It was a time of peculiar anxiety for all parties. If the Hussars lost their horses through the vessel going to pieces—for a time not an unlikely contingency—the Nile Expedition would be handicapped sorely by an unfortunate deficiency in cavalry. Fortunately, however, the good ship held together, and the men and their mounts were safely landed little the worse of their trying experience.

In the meantime the Mahdi was inflaming his fanatical followers with the magic message, 'I am coming—be ready!' El Teb was

reached on 29th February, and the column, with the 19th Hussars to the right of the square, moved forward to battle with the pipers of the Black Watch skirling a challenge to the dusky foe. According to a war correspondent, the joke that as the Highlanders could not be in the front ranks, they had determined to frighten the enemy with their unearthly music, ran round the square, and the column moved forward in light spirit.

Despite a determined fire from the British lines the Sudanese essayed a frantic charge in groups of varied numbers. Ultimately the engagement became a hand-to-hand struggle. Now the 19th Hussars, lances ready poised, charged and caused the enemy to change front. This was followed by a forward movement by our men, and the battle was won gloriously.

‘The enemy do not come on in masses, wrote the *Standard’s* correspondent, ‘but in groups of twenties and thirties, sometimes of twos and threes, sometimes alone. They dash forward against our ranks with poised spear, but not a man reaches the line of bayonets, for one and all are swept away before

the terrible fire of musketry which breaks out with a rush forward. For a moment on the other side of the square the matter seems to be in doubt.

‘So hotly do the Arabs press forward that the troops pause in their steady advance. It becomes a hand to hand fight, the soldiers meeting the Arab spear with cold steel, their favourite weapons, and beating them at it. There is not much shouting, and only a short sharp exclamation, a brief shout or an oath as the soldiers engage with their foes. At this critical moment, for the enemy are rushing up thickly, the Gardner guns open fire and their leaden hail soon decides matters. . . .

‘Several fierce personal encounters take place as the troops rush into the entrenchments. The first feeling of nervousness has passed away, their blood is up now, and the enthusiasm of battle is on them. More and more the shrill pipes skirl out and the men are eager to close with the foe.’

During a halt the cavalry moved round behind the square and advanced towards a large mass of the now retreating Arabs. The sabres of the horsemen flashed in the

sunlight and the squadron dashed into the enemy, cutting their way through and then wheeling to get back. Stubbornly and sullenly the Arabs stood to meet them, only to be frequently dispersed.

In his official despatch General Graham reported that the action lasted three hours, the enemy showing desperate resolution and tenacity. 'The cavalry,' he added, 'were very ably handled and made some dashing charges.'

No prisoners were taken at the fight. Indeed it was impossible to take any, for the wounded Arabs would lie still whilst life lasted, rarely uttering a cry or a moan, but watching a chance to strike with knife or spear. It was, indeed, in the terse phraseology of a soldier, like walking among wounded vipers to walk among the Arab wounded, and in sheer defence our men were forced to kill them. Our men who fell even for a few minutes into the enemy's hands were dreadfully cut and gashed by sword and spear.

'In advancing on the scattered entrenchments and houses the formation became somewhat disordered, owing to the desire of the men on the flank faces of the square to

fire to their front. The Gordon Highlanders speedily rectified this, moving one half battalion into the fighting line, the other half being thrown back to guard against flank attacks. The Royal Highlanders were somewhat out of hand. I would, however, beg to observe,' says the General in his official despatch, 'that the ground was a most difficult one to move over, and that the desperate tenacity with which the enemy held a house on the right of the Royal Highlanders caused the men to form in an irregular manner, so as to pour a converging fire on it.

'The force of the enemy was difficult to estimate, and in my first telegram I put it at 10,000. Subsequent native testimony makes me estimate it at 6000 fighting men, and I am informed that they admit a loss of 1500 killed. In the immediate neighbourhood of Teb 825 bodies were counted, and I am informed that it is the custom of these people to carry off their dead when practicable. I am also informed that the women of the tribes were present with hatchets to despatch our wounded.'

It was said that no such cavalry as that

engaged, nearly 800 sabres, had charged the enemy since Waterloo. The effective working of the force, its admirable coolness and discipline, the rapid and steady rallying of the line, were therefore matters of peculiar interest.

Osman Digna explained his defeat by saying that he gave his men in mistake the wrong kind of fetish against shot and lead !

An eloquent proclamation issued jointly by General Graham and Admiral Hewett after the battle was in the following terms : ‘ You have already been warned that the British force has come here not only to relieve Tokar but to redress the wrongs under which you have so long suffered. Nevertheless you have gone on trusting that notorious scoundrel Osman Digna, well known to you all as a bad man, his former life in Suakin having proved that to be the case. He has led you away with the foolish idea that the Mahdi has come to earth. The great God who rules the universe does not send such scoundrels as Osman Digna as his messengers. Your people are brave, and Britain always respects such men. Awake, then. Chase Osman Digna from your country. We promise you that

protection and pardon shall be granted to all who come in at once; otherwise the fate of those who fell at El Teb shall surely overtake you.'

CHAPTER III

THE NILE EXPEDITION

'THE primary object of the expedition up the Nile is to bring away General Gordon and Colonel Stewart from Khartoum; no further offensive operations are to be undertaken.' Such were the explicit instructions given by the British Government to Lord Wolseley, who, with Lord Northbrook, left England on 31st August, 1884, arriving at Cairo on 9th September. Meantime the British troops were being pushed up the Nile with all speed. The General Commanding arrived at Wady Halfa on the 5th October. For almost two months he was fully occupied in the arduous work of getting through or past the cataracts as far as to Korti.

There are some critics of latter days who have contemptuously characterised this venture

as 'an expedition of disasters and shoddy bayonets.' The correspondent of *The Times*, writing on the spot, said: 'Probably no expedition ever was so quickly and so thoroughly organised, and the greatest credit is due to all concerned in it.' Major French was in command of the single squadron of his regiment, which formed General Sir Herbert Stewart's sole cavalry force.

It was only on 30th December that the first detachment of General Sir Herbert Stewart's early convoy left Korti for Gakdul, which they reached on the 2nd January without opposition. The small bodies of the enemy that were known to have been hovering around during the previous few days disappeared promptly as the column advanced. The next halting-place was Abu Halfa, eighty-eight miles from Korti, and the Gakdul Well was reached on the morning of the 12th, in eighty-eight hours, including stoppages, from the time of leaving Korti. On the afternoon of the 16th General Stewart, with whom were Colonel Burnaby and Sir Charles Wilson, set out with the light flying column for Metammeh on the Nile, where they expected to join

hands with General Gordon by means of his steamers.

The march of Sir Herbert Stewart's force from Korti to Abu Klea was a memorable one for those who took part in it. The force consisted of the Guards, the Camel Corps, the Mounted Infantry, the 19th Hussars, and the Naval Brigade. It numbered between 1500 and 1600. It was with the 19th Hussars on this particular occasion that Major French made a name for himself as a cavalry officer.

That determined trek through what seemed endless miles of desert will never be forgotten by the participants. The vast waste appeared to be deserted save for a few nomadic Arabs. From these people it was learned that no hostile force was within many days' march. It was an experience calculated to try the most unwavering soldier, but there was never a murmur, and the soldiers made light of it. The intense heat of the burning sun in the desert had a most deleterious effect upon the men and their animals, but the grit of the little force upon their march from Korti to Abu Klea won them through.

One of the prisoners captured by Major

French's regiment was discovered to be a notorious brigand and robber chief who was touring the desert with his wife, and whose predatory exploits were put a stop to for the time by his being forced to remain in the safe custody of the Hussars, who got great amusement from their capture. Another of the prisoners got during the rounding-up of the district took off the Mahdi uniform when he was captured, and spat upon it viciously to indicate that only compulsion had made him don the uniform at all.

Upon its arrival the Expeditionary Force resembled Falstaff's Ragged Regiment more than a body of British troops, and a trooper of Major French's gallant mounted regiment to-day recalls with much amusement that 'the tartan trews of the Black Watch were patched with old sacks, with native cloth from the bazaars, and even portions of biscuit bags had been sewn to the leg-ware to keep them from bursting altogether!'

It was at Abu Klea on 17th January, 1885, that the first battle of the Nile Expedition was fought. Abu Klea lies on the route across country between Korti and Metammeh, both

on the great bend of the Nile below Khartoum. It is situated 148 miles from Korti, about fifty miles from Gakdul, and about twenty-four miles from Metammeh. It marked in these days the last place for an important halt for the caravans going to Khartoum before reaching Metammeh.

‘British steel,’ says a contemporary chronicler, ‘has once again come fairly in contact with Arab brass, and again the brass has gone down before the steel. On the former occasion it was General Graham who proved the superiority of British sinew and science against the splendid daring of the Mahdi’s forces under Osman Digna. This time it is General Stewart who has led a small British force against 10,000 warriors of the Mahdi. The battle was fought on Saturday afternoon, 17th inst., and ended in a brilliant British victory. Altogether nearly 1000 of the enemy were slain, while the British losses also were heavy.’

On the day before the battle, the cavalry scoured the country in advance, and reported the enemy in some force between the British line of march and the wells. The report

reached General Stewart in the afternoon' but too late to advance to the attack that evening. It was decided to bivouac for the night, and to secure the position by the effective means of a stockade. There was, however, very little rest for the gallant little band. All night long the enemy entertained themselves by firing upon the British position. Though they did no material damage they succeeded in keeping their prospective opponents in battle well awake. The spot where the British had bivouacked was situated at the south-east side of the great plain, with distant hills to the right and the left, and a black and rugged ridge in front, over a saddle of which the caravan route led to Abu Klea. The 19th Hussars were told off to reconnoitre, and, as already indicated, they had a busy night of it.

The zareba which was formed by General Stewart for the night had flanking squares strongly occupied, and pickets holding important strategic posts on the lofty hills. On the British left the men were thrice called to arms before dawn. About half-past seven o'clock in the morning the enemy's scouts

were reported to be trying to creep round the hills on the left flank, and the Hussars were sent forward to check this movement.

Almost immediately the brave British force were upon their feet, alive and alert, and fully ready for the stern work before them. As the position occupied by General Stewart appeared to be quite a good one, he endeavoured to draw the enemy out of their strongly fortified position on the right flank of the British. But the men of the desert refused to be tempted. Their object seems to have been to lure the British into an ugly spot, plenty of which abounded. In this they failed.

Seeing that the enemy were disinclined to come forth to offer battle, General Stewart, leaving the impedimenta and camels under a strong guard, moved forward in square, all men on foot, and passed round the left flank of the enemy's position, thus forcing him to attack or be enfiladed. Such a manœuvre woke the enemy up, and according to Lord Wolseley's despatch recounting the battle, the enemy wheeled on the left and delivered a well organised charge under a devastating fire. Fanatically brave as they

were, the Mahdi's men turned away like a wave thrown off by a jagged rock. The onslaught was magnificently daring, but the brilliant stand of the British rendered the effort nugatory.

The disposition of the two forces has been thus graphically described: 'Their leaders, sheikhs or dervishes, clad in conspicuously-embroidered Mahdi shirts, were stationed at intervals of about twenty-five yards apart, mounted on fleet little horses. The lines were at least half a mile long, whereas our front barely extended when in square to 150 yards.' Advancing in square formation, General Stewart reported in his despatch, 'the British force at once attracted a fairly-aimed fire from the enemy, in front and on both flanks, which, in order to enable the square to continue moving, it was absolutely necessary to hold in check by the fire of skirmishers.

'The enemy's main position was soon apparent, and by passing that position well clear of its left flank, it was manifest that he must attack or be enfiladed. As the square was nearly abreast of the position, the enemy

delivered his attack in the shape of a singularly well-organised charge, commencing with a wheel to the left.'

In the meanwhile the 19th Hussars had been divided into two companies, one of which moved to the left of the square and the other followed the British march. Upon the vast plain that formed the battlefield, the serried mass of the British troops appeared like a small speck. But, as the Mahdi's forces were soon to find out, there was devil and fight enough in that small speck to rout overwhelming numbers. The attack continued relentlessly, and among those who fell wounded in the fray were the Earl of Airlie, Lord Charles Beresford, and Lord St Vincent. Despite troubles with the ammunition, however—'Our mongrel cartridge sticks worse than ever, positively, at Abu Klea and later at Metammeh. I saw scores of weapons rendered temporarily useless'—the splendid stand of the gallant little force told at last; and followed by resounding cheers from the victors, the dusky sons of the desert fled precipitately.

Meanwhile the 19th Hussars, who had

played their part with outstanding distinction, advanced to the wells, which were reached in the early afternoon. There they found a quartet of wounded Arabs who refused to put down their spears and had to be shot. There was only one unwounded prisoner, who said he was glad to have escaped the Mahdi's relentless rule. After their battle clash at Abu Klea, the British force rested for twenty-four hours and then pushed forward towards the Nile at Metammeh. The Hussars buried sixty men at the spot where the square was attacked and burst in.

'It has been my duty to command a force from which exceptional work, exceptional hardships, and it may even be added exceptional fighting has been called for. It would be impossible,' said General Stewart, in his report, 'for me adequately to describe the admirable support that has been given to me by every officer and man of the force. I regret to say that our loss has been severe; but the success has been so complete and the enemy's loss so very heavy, that it may dishearten the enemy, so that all future fighting may be of a less obstinate character.'

For his excellent work with a detachment of his regiment, Major French earned the warm praise of Sir Redvers Buller.

CHAPTER IV

WAR AND AFTER •

REFRESHED from the Abu Klea Wells, the British force set out for Metammeh Wells, which place was regarded as one of the keys of the situation.

Despite many hindrances and discouragements the cavalcade moved forward slowly but surely, and their progress was a memorable occasion for all who took part. With it all, the expedition kept wonderfully cheery, and if discipline was to a large extent relaxed, the accomplishment of the object in view was a splendid tribute to the good sense and fine leadership of those in command no less than the pluck and determination of the men.

On the morning of the 19th they came in sight and touch of the enemy about half a dozen miles south of Metammeh. The Arabs were in fair fighting trim. Mr Bennet

Burleigh, the veteran war correspondent, himself always a warm admirer of Major French (whose career he followed, until his recent death, with great interest), wrote in one of his descriptive despatches, that he saw the first shot fired by an Arab scout. The skirmish that ensued, in which the 19th Hussars took no inconsiderable part, was most disastrous to the rebels.

‘Tell the officers and men we will have breakfast first and then go out and fight,’ said General Stewart. For once the Commander proved a false prophet. No sooner had preparations for the meal been entered upon than the Arabs came forward in threatening manner and endeavoured to open fire. It was a hot breakfast and hot work; for the enemy gave the British troops a service of hot bullets which in some respects did their work with deadly efficiency. A number of the enemy had hidden themselves behind great ridges of rock and were comparatively secure.

With calm deliberation the British force formed in square formation, with the 19th Hussars to the rear, along with Lord Charles

Beresford's detachment of Bluejackets. As the square boldly advanced, the Arabs literally raced to meet it like a rushing storm. There was no wavering on the part of the British, and the Mahdi's men soon paused, staggered, reeled, and fled from the terrible storm of lead. The British zareba was also assaulted with equal determination, but, fortunately, with no better success.

The British force, few in numbers but great in valour, fought like gladiators. 'A more glorious sight was never seen,' a chronicler writes of the encounter, 'than this little band, in broad daylight, on an open plain, seeking hand-to-hand conflict with the courageous, savage, and fanatical foe who outnumbered them by at least twelve to one.'

In this engagement General Stewart was wounded. Lord Charles Beresford was next senior officer, and the command should have devolved upon him, but being a navyman, and 'off colour,' he deputed the duties of leading the troops to Colonel Sir Charles Wilson of the Royal Engineers. For a while matters seemed serious, but there was no wavering,

and once again the day was determinedly and doggedly won.

One of the detachments engaged in the thrilling fight had entered ground too thickly covered by grass and scrub. The little party deliberately halted, coolly swung round, and in good order marched out upon the more open ground with the Arabs to the right front, their tom-toms beating and sacred battle-flags of red, white, and green fluttering in the breeze. It was a semi-barbaric scene that stamped itself indelibly upon Major French's memory.

The sequel to the fight at Metammeh was a bold adventure—to push on at all costs to the Nile for water. Lord Charles Beresford and Colonel Barrow of the 19th Hussars were left in charge of the zareba, which had been formed at Abu Kru (or Gubut, as the place is also called). A vicious attack was made upon the zareba by what seemed overwhelming numbers. The small force in the zareba replied with tremendous spirit. In tight corners several times, the British arms, guided wisely and well, escaped just as often; and at last, foiled completely by the stubborn

resistance and stern front shown by the British, the Arabs were forced themselves to turn and make off in the direction of Metammeh.

This success enabled the British force to select a strong position and to entrench themselves at Gubut on the Nile bank. Four of General Gordon's steamers came down the river, and this enabled General Wilson to make a reconnaissance in the direction of Metammeh. Among the documents brought down was one which gave rise to some controversy as to its authenticity: 'Khartoum all right—could hold out for years.—C. G. Gordon, Dec. 29, 1884.'

A reverse during a sortie had resulted in Gordon being left at Khartoum with only Colonel Stewart and the British Consul (Mr Power) to keep him company in charge of such of the native troops as had remained loyal. 'I shall hold out here as long as I can,' he wrote in a historic despatch, 'and if I can suppress the insurrection I shall do so.' Then the enemy took Berber, and Gordon's hope appeared to evaporate. Khartoum fell on the 26th January, and the news of General

Gordon's untimely end created a profound sensation throughout Great Britain.

When the British force was retiring across the Bayuda desert, after the failure to save the gallant Gordon, Major French, according to Sir Evelyn Wood, was to be seen coming back—the last man of the last section of the rearguard. As in the advance so in the retirement of the British column, Major French's troopers acted as the rearguard, a most important position. They found it necessary to be constantly on the alert for the attacks of the enemy, who were consistently repulsed. As a result of his work in Egypt, Major French was mentioned in despatches, and was awarded the Egyptian medal with two clasps and the Khedive's bronze star.

Reviewing the 19th Hussars at Korti, Lord Wolseley in a pithy oration warmly complimented them, praising both officers and men for their services generally with the desert and the river columns, and particularly for the plucky way in which they had discharged arduous duties and endured desert hardships. Sir Herbert Stewart, he said, had told him after the battle of Korti that the

regiment was one of the finest he had ever seen, and their recent behaviour had convinced Lord Wolseley that this was true.

In view of the magnificent response of the British colonial troops at the present time of the nation's need, it is interesting to recall the fact that during the Nile Expedition an Australian contingent joined in the operations. 'The fact of Australia being able to send such troops,' said Lord Wolseley, in a farewell address, 'will probably deter any Power from hastily joining in any war against Great Britain.' To the Sudanese Expedition in general, Lord Wolseley wrote from Suakin under date 16th May :—

'Her Majesty's Government having decided to withdraw most of the troops from the Sudan, I desire, when bidding you farewell, to express to all my deep sense of your admirable conduct. The army in the Sudan has not only fought with courage and firmness, and cheerfully borne no small amount of hardship : it has shown, in addition, qualities higher even than those required for the patient endurance of privation, or for the defeat of the brave but cruel enemy with whom it has

been engaged. Crime has been almost unknown in the ranks; the highest standard of discipline has been maintained, and the behaviour of the troops—British, Indian, and Colonial—has been in every way creditable to them and to the services to which they belong.

‘My best thanks are due to all ranks of the Royal Navy and of the Marines who have taken part in the recent campaign in the Sudan. Wherever hard work or hard fighting was to be done, the men of those services were to be found, and I am at a loss to say whether they were more remarkable for their hard work or their hard fighting. From the beginning of the operations in last September to the present date, both officers and men of the Navy have been untiring in their exertions, and all they had to do has been done effectively and well.

‘I would also again thank the gallant New South Wales Contingent for the services they have rendered; and also for the sympathy which prompted them to come from afar to take part in a war undertaken by the Empire to which we all belong. . . .

‘Among the many and varied memories of the recent campaign, the remembrance of your keen soldier-like spirit will be the pleasantest to dwell upon; and I shall always feel proud of having commanded you.’

During the period of peace intervening between the Nile Expedition and the South African War, Major French’s progress, so far as promotion was concerned, was not too fast, though his accomplishment of the work that he found to do earned for him frequent high praise from those in authority. On 7th February, 1885, he became a Lieutenant-Colonel, and spent the next four or five years in ordinary barrack routine.

Notwithstanding his success, the young officer’s progress, owing (according to the *United Service Gazette*) to the difficulty he had in overcoming old ideas and notions and replacing them with up-to-date ones, was relatively slow, and it was not till the manœuvres at Salisbury in 1898 that his future was assured. On that occasion he showed such signal ability that Sir Redvers Buller, who was in charge of the manœuvres, recommended him, when hostilities broke

out in South Africa, as the best possible officer to take command of the cavalry in Natal.

Sir Evelyn Wood, in his recently published *Reminiscences*, states that 'Licutenant-Colonel French of the 19th Hussars, after he came to Aldershot, was a warm supporter of my efforts to improve the cavalry. I was unable to obtain for him written authority to carry out the squadron system in its entirety, but he did it, and with such decision as to disregard the claims of seniority for the command of squadrons.' He was gazetted Colonel on 7th February, 1889, thus attaining the active command of his regiment after about fifteen years' service. Colonel French quickly brought his regiment to a very high state of efficiency. He earned for himself the sobriquet of the 'Galloping Colonel' on account of his insistence that all parade movements should be taken at the gallop.

Colonel French's outstanding success as a cavalry officer brought him more and more under notice, and an important colonial appointment fell to him when he was selected to serve in India as Chief of the Staff of

General Luck. Sir George White was Commander-in-Chief in India when French was Luck's right hand man in manœuvres spread over hundreds of miles. These manœuvres attracted world-wide attention, and it was largely owing to the great skill with which Colonel French carried them out that they were so successful. Subsequently he made a deep and intimate study of the systems and tactics of the European cavalry, and he has been given the credit of being practically the author of the British cavalry drill books, which contained some striking innovations.

According to regulations, Colonel French was retired on half-pay in 1895, but in October of that year his services were requisitioned at Headquarters as Assistant Adjutant-General, an appointment he held with distinction until the end of April, 1897. Next he was employed as Colonel on the Staff in Command of the Cavalry Brigade stationed at Canterbury, and it was while he was acting in that capacity that the South African War broke out. Just before going to the front he was raised to the rank of Major-General.

CHAPTER V

THE BOER WAR

ALIENS simply poured into the Boer States of South Africa when, in 1886, the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand was announced. The authorities, perturbed at this immense influx of a foreign element, refused to recognise the language of the Uitlanders or to admit them to the franchise except on conditions which could hardly be expected to be accepted. And all the time the new-comers were severely taxed. So serious did the grievances of the Uitlanders become that they decided to use force, and the Jameson Raid of 1898 was the result.

Sir Alfred (afterwards Lord) Milner the previous year had been sent out as High Commissioner, and when all means had seemingly failed he was summoned home in 1899 to report on the situation. The result was that a proposal was put forward by Mr Joseph Chamberlain that a conference should take place at Bloemfontein between Sir Alfred and President Kruger. The conference was

abortive, and after three months' futile diplomatic correspondence, the British Government finally informed the Transvaal Government that they would deliberate on the matter themselves without further consulting the Transvaal.

In view of the threatening state of things on the undefended British frontiers troops had been moved up country. On the 9th October, a Boer ultimatum was presented, demanding the countermanding of the precautionary movements and other promises within forty-eight hours. The ultimatum was ignored, and on the 10th October the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, assisted by many Afrikanders from the Cape, began the war, which came to a conclusion with the peace terms signed on the 31st May, 1902.

Hitherto, as a chronicler truly remarks, the Transvaal had been the grave rather than the cradle of reputations, but Sir John French, who went out a comparatively unknown man, returned home with a fine record. He proved himself times without number to be one of the greatest soldiers of the British Army; while as a cavalry leader and tactician he

showed that there were few his equal. It was on 23rd September, 1899, that General French, just raised to Major-General's rank, left London. Despite a tendency in certain quarters to criticise the appointment, he had been selected to command the Cavalry Division in Natal. The work he did during the war was, as has been pointed out, the best indication of the wisdom of the choice. 'In Natal,' an expert says, 'his cavalry was not only large in numbers but excellent also in quality and training.' Its leadership was superb.

General French's first achievement in the war was the winning of the battle of Elands-laagte, described by some as the one real British success in the earlier stages of the long-drawn-out campaign against the wily Boers. Moreover, it is generally acknowledged that the clever tactics of General French converted the battle from a possible defeat into a certain victory. The success, a brilliant one, was gained on the 21st October, 1899. Elands-laagte was a little village, containing a railway station, situated seventeen miles to the north-east of Ladysmith.

On the day before the battle, Boer forces acting from the north had cut the railway at Elandslaagte between Ladysmith (where Sir George White had his headquarters) and Glencoe Junction. This was obviously intended as a preliminary step in a combined attack from the east and the west. It failed signally. The position of the Boers was extremely critical, and Sir George White resolved to strike at once before they had time either to retreat or to strengthen their position. He subsequently sent out from Ladysmith, at four o'clock on Saturday morning, a force of all arms under General French.

The force included the 5th Lancers, Natal Carabineers, Border Mounted Rifles, 2nd Gordons, 1st Devons, 1st Manchesters, and 42nd and 21st Field Batteries of artillery. They proceeded by road and rail to the bridge over Modder Spruit, a point on the railway five miles south-west of Elandslaagte. Cavalry scouts located the Boers behind the railway station of the town. The station was captured, but the British troops relinquished it after having taken some prisoners, whose information was found to be of considerable service

in the carrying out of the operations. An armoured train accompanied the cavalry. Elandslaagte was approached with due caution, but towards half-past eight o'clock the enemy came in sight. The Boers were riding about on the small plain in which Elandslaagte was situated. Their main position was on a long rocky ridge which dropped at the northern end to a 'nek' or pass, where their camp had been pitched. It was obvious from the reports of the scouts that the enemy were in considerable force.

The Boers had just finished their morning coffee when General French opened fire by sending a shell from a seven-pounder into the station shed. The British guns were the objects of the reply fire of the Boers, and so effective was their range that an ammunition wagon was put out of action. To save themselves the order was given to fall back, and the British got out of range as quickly as they could. At once General French sent an urgent message for reinforcements, which duly arrived. Colonel Ian Hamilton came with them, and brought the total troops under General French's command

up to 2000 infantry, 480 artillery, and 800 cavalry.

With these reinforcements, the general decided to go back immediately to the attack, and the real engagement began about half-past three o'clock. The British artillery opened fire at 4100 yards range, and the enemy quickly responded from a strong position on rocky hills a mile and a half south-east of Elandslaagte. The Boer guns were served with splendid pluck, the men returning time after time to their posts after being driven off by the devastating fire of the British. Eventually the guns were silenced, and British infantry who, while the artillery duel was proceeding, were working round on the enemy's left flank, finally rushed the position in the most dashing manner, and captured two guns and the entire camp equipment of the Boers. The cavalry and mounted infantry did splendid service.

A terrific thunderstorm broke over the battle-field during the engagement, and the awfulness of the scene was thus intensified. Before the battle was over gray night came creeping over the kopjes.

The despatches from the front (said a Cape Town correspondent, regarding the battle of Elandslaagte) showed it to have been a brilliant feat of arms. The fact of the Boers holding the place and thereby cutting the connections by railway between the two British main positions at Ladysmith and Glencoe was brought to the knowledge of the British by the capture of a passenger train and another train with stores and provisions for Glencoe. The necessity for driving the enemy from their position being recognised, General French, by the orders of Sir George White, left Ladysmith early on October 21, 1899, with a considerable force, which was gradually increased by road and rail as soon as the strength of the Boer position and force was ascertained.

Sir George White himself went with the reinforcements, but he left the operations in the hands of General French. The infantry were under the command of Colonel Hamilton. The Boer position was three miles to the south-east of the station, and was both strong in itself and easily defended. At half-past three o'clock in the afternoon the British

artillery, the 21st and the 43rd Field Batteries, and the Natal Field Batteries opened fire at a range of 4000 yards. A prolonged artillery duel followed, in which the Boer guns showed far better practice than they had done at Glencoe.

The enemy's shells burst well, but the elevation was rather high. The British gunners did their work so well that the opposing batteries were silenced, though only for a while. Meanwhile the infantry were gradually advancing on the left of the Boers' position. The Imperial Light Horse were working in the same direction when a number of mounted Boers advanced to meet them. The Light Horse thereupon retired under cover of the guns, and the infantry took up a fresh position protected by artillery.

General French, aided by his able Chief of the Staff, Colonel Douglas Haig, handled his men beautifully, timing and keeping the whole operation well in hand.

While the battle was being sternly waged, an amusing little comedy was taking place at Elandslaagte Station. One person the

Boers appeared to have marked out particularly was the stationmaster. They left a man in charge of this luckless official with strict injunctions to shoot him. However, when the Boer who was charged with the commission came to consider how he was going to carry out the deadly instructions, he found he had no ammunition. He appealed to the stationmaster to help him, and that gentleman, with a reasonableness of suggestion born of the exacting position in which he had been placed, said: 'The best thing you can do is to hide that rifle and come with me and have some lunch.' The rifle was accordingly hidden and the stationmaster's life was spared.

General Sir George White came up by special train and witnessed the operations until success was secured, when he returned to Ladysmith. Shells fell thick about Sir George White, and one burst in the midst of his escort, killing two horses, but no personal injury was sustained. 'I attended as a spectator,' was the simple message regarding his own presence on the battle-field that Sir George White, the Commander-in-Chief in

Natal, sent home in reporting General French's splendid feat of arms.

General French dictated the following soldier-like message to Mr Bennet Burleigh, to take to Sir George White to Ladysmith : ' I have taken the position. Rather severe losses. Have taken enemy's artillery, three guns. Am occupying enemy's camp and securing hills till morning. I intend during night to place detachment in railway station to secure same and to bring trains up into station; get ready to repair line at daybreak, through to mines if possible.'

The battle of Elandslaagte was noteworthy for a remarkable incident. The Boers had got to know the British bugle calls, and the 'Cease Fire' and 'Retire' were sounded. In obedience to that sound the Gordons were beginning to go back when their bugler, shouting, 'Retire be damned !' rushed forward and blew a hearty charge, and the signal was right smartly responded to. Elandslaagte was of peculiar interest to General French because, apart from the fact that he had the honour to command on that occasion, it marked the first time in his life that he

actually saw the British infantry in action, and learned from what he saw how the British infantry worked in their greatest of all duties, the storming of a strong position.

Wonderful quantities of loot, from silk hats and frock coats to bearded Kafir loin cloths, were got by the British 'Tommies.' Among the more substantial prizes of war captured by the British arms were the train, officers, and correspondents taken by the Boers on the 19th October.

The Free State Boers having taken possession of Elands-laagte after the British had withdrawn their force, and begun to damage the railway again, General French pushed his brigade once more towards Elands-laagte, and was met with a long range fire by the Boers, holding kopjes near the road. Their fire was so accurate that one shell fell near the General's escort, but nobody was hurt. His object accomplished after a slight engagement, the General finally withdrew his force.

Though checked at Talana Hill and Elands-laagte, the Boers were gradually surrounding Sir George White in Ladysmith, and on the

2nd November the siege of the town had begun. A British disaster had previously occurred at Nicholson's Nek. On the 5th of November, General French had arrived at De Aar, and had taken command there. With characteristic energy French at once began to move. With a mounted force he re-occupied Naauwpoort on 20th November, and set out from there in search of the enemy. He was engaged for some weeks in protecting the lines and checking the risings that were taking place in the vicinity.

On the day before the Boers invested Ladysmith, after one of the frequent assaults by the Boers to which the town had been treated, General White resolved to send General French, in view of the seriousness of the position, with despatches to General Buller. French had the rare good luck to board the last train that left the town. It was a particularly perilous venture. The whole countryside was studded with Boers and Burghers keeping a sharp look-out for despatch-bearers.

As a matter of fact, they searched the

train on which French was a passenger, but they failed to find him. And little wonder. Sir John accomplished the journey lying flat under the seat, the despatch being concealed between the cushions. His narrow escape cost the enemy dear. The train had an exciting enough journey. It puffed along amid a perfect hail of bullets. On one occasion a shell hit one of the carriages, going right through it, yet the train finished its journey safely.

CHAPTER VI

COLESBERG AND KIMBERLEY

It is a noteworthy fact that the position of General French was the only ray of sunshine in the Black Week that ended on the 15th December. After his thrilling escape from Ladysmith, General French found plenty of work to do in the important strategical country lying between Stormberg Junction, on the main line from East London to Bloemfontein, and De Aar, on the main line from Kimberley to Cape Town. That particular

part of the country was full of rebellion and discontent, and the people of the Orange Free State had over-run the countryside.

In his task of dealing with these mutineers French had many a sanguinary engagement with his cavalymen pitted against the armed Burghers.

On 28th November, French, in charge of a company of the Black Watch, a small section of Mounted Infantry, and some New South Wales Lancers made for Colesberg, his means of transport being an armoured train, which was attacked from the cover of the hills at Arundel, a midway station. The Australians made a successful reconnaissance—it was the first time any of the Antipodeans had been under fire in the Boer War—and reported that the railway had been cut.

‘British officers have no brains themselves and do not give anybody else credit for having any.’ This was a frequent gibe of General Joubert. But there was one exception. As a refreshingly original student of tactics for these days, General French was a firm believer in the art of manœuvring an enemy out of position, and his skill in that direction was

amply proved in the admirable manner in which he utilised Colesberg as a depot for his fine force of mobile, rapidly acting cavalry, which must have proved a constant worry even to the wily Boers. Sir John French himself has confessed that the Colesberg operations were the key to his future success.

The country on his flanks having been scoured by troops under Colonel Porter of the 6th Dragoon Guards, General French advanced and seized Tweeddale, a station south of Arundel; then he occupied Arundel, thrusting Schoeman out of that town. This kept De Aar out of danger of attack from the enemy. With the object of interfering with French's communications, 1800 Boers started before daylight on the 13th December for Naauwpoort. French, however, was wide-awake, and the 6th Dragoons, the 6th Dragoon Guards, the 10th (Prince of Wales's Own) Hussars, and a quartet of 'R' Battery Royal Horse Artillery guns were sent out to meet the advancing party who, under the accurate fire of the guns, found it necessary to retire upon Colesberg. The position which marked the Boer centre was briskly shelled

by the British artillery, and the attempted flanking movements on the part of the enemy were checked by the cavalry and the infantry. At length the Boers retired on Colesberg.

It was with the utmost deliberation that General French proceeded with the operations before Colesberg. He refrained from bombarding the town because of the presence of non-combatants, including women and children. In the meantime he occupied himself in taking all the kopjes and important positions dominating Arundel Camp. In this movement some brilliant reconnaissance work was done by his troops. On the 30th December, the General struck his camp, removing it to Rensberg Siding the following day.

Along with the 10th Hussars and the Inniskilling Dragoons General French made a personal scouting tour, as a result of which he was able to give the Boers under Grobler a stern New Year's greeting, opening fire on the Boer position at Colesberg, where the strength of the enemy was judged to be between 5000 and 7000. Colesberg was important as a stepping-stone to the Orange

River, the crossing of which was one of the essentials to the march on Bloemfontein. The operations were skilfully conceived and swiftly carried out. Cavalry, artillery, and infantry forces were engaged.

The Boers were utterly surprised, and finding their retreat threatened, they fled in disorder to the eastward, leaving Colesberg in the hands of the British, the infantry being carried forward in wagons to allow of their keeping pace with the other arms. 'General French, by making a night march,' the *Daily News* correspondent stated, 'completely surprised the enemy, and it is this clever manœuvre which is principally responsible for their retreat.'

An exciting feature of the day's proceedings was a race for a runaway provision train. This train was loaded with three days' rations, and was left standing on a gradient at Rensberg, where General French's camp was pitched. About ten o'clock the brakes, in a manner which is little short of mysterious, failed to act; and the train, gaining speed every moment, ran away past Plewman's Siding, about four miles away, along the curve to the

right, and got derailed by a broken culvert just opposite the end of a valley on each side of which were posted the Boers in force. The rescue work was hazardous. The hills on each side of the valley looked quiet enough, but the rescue train did not trust them, and it was well its occupants were suspicious. A hot fire was directed upon the party, who sought shelter in a donga. The Boers laughed at first, but later they disappeared.

General Buller's original plan seems to have been the invasion of the Republics from the south, but the relief of Ladysmith appeared to be more urgently required, and operations to secure that object were first entered upon. General French was entrusted with the command of the railway, and was stationed at Naauwpoort. After the disasters at Ladysmith (where General White was effectually shut in by the Boers) and Colenso, Lord Roberts took over the command, with Lord Kitchener as the Chief of his Staff.

When Lord Roberts arrived at Cape Town on the 10th January, General French, with three cavalry regiments and a battalion and

a half of infantry, was holding the line from Naauwpoort to Rensberg, on the road to Bloemfontein.

In the period that intervened between Lord Roberts's departure from Britain and arrival in South Africa, French had thrust Schoeman out of Arundel and Rensberg, and occupied Colesberg, until he was summoned on the 29th January to Cape Town to confer with Lord Roberts, who informed him of the plan of campaign.

Lord Roberts's plan of campaign was first to effect the relief of Kimberley, with the cavalry division under General French, and then to advance upon Bloemfontein. He was to give the enemy no peace, but was to keep them always on the move.

The cavalry actions were carried on over a front of twenty miles for three months, and did much to hold Schoeman, Delarey, and De Wet in check, and afford the commander and his men invaluable experience of South African conditions of warfare.

In a despatch dated 23rd February, 1900, referring to the operations around Colesberg, Lord Roberts remarked: 'I consider that

Lieutenant-General French showed marked ability and judgment in constantly harassing the enemy and driving them from one strong position after another without exposing his men to heavy loss. I concur with him in thinking that the discipline, courage, and endurance of the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men employed in these operations are deserving of high commendation, and I am glad that the Royal Horse Artillery and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles appear to have distinguished themselves.'

General Clements entered Colesberg on 28th February, 1900.

On the 10th February Lord Roberts had asked General French to call his troops together, and, this being done, 'Bobs' informed the band that they were all about to get the greatest chance that cavalry had ever had; they were to set out to the relief of Kimberley. 'Even though you leave half of your strength upon the road you are to reach Kimberley.' Such, in effect, was the typical order received by French from Lord Roberts. French's command had meantime been reorganised as follows: First Brigade—Scots

Greys, Carabineers, Inniskillings (one squadron), 14th Hussars (one squadron), New South Wales Horse (one squadron), Royal Horse Artillery (three batteries). Second Brigade—Household Cavalry, 10th Hussars, 12th Lancers, Royal Horse Artillery (three batteries). Third Brigade—9th Lancers, 16th Lancers, Royal Horse Artillery (two batteries). Mounted Infantry—Roberts's Horse, Kitchener's Horse, Queensland and New Zealand Mounted Infantry. The personnel was between 4000 and 5000, and the troops were given five days' food supply and 200 rounds of ammunition for each man. Each gun had 400 rounds of ammunition.

At midday on the 11th February, the troops arrived at Ramdam, facing the drifts of the Riet River. To reach this point of concentration involved a twenty-two mile march, which was accomplished in the excellent time of seven hours. Thence a move was made for the River Riet. As they approached the river, Waterval Drift was found to be occupied by De Wet, and a division was diverted to De Kiel's Drift, whence a northward movement was made, De Wet watching

the British progress narrowly. But the wily Boer was this time outdone. On the early morning of the 12th General French, leaving the line of railway and going eastward, crossed the river between Cronje's camp and the capital. He swept round through Waterval and Klip's Drift. Thus, by a finely executed movement, he became in possession of its north bank, commanding also two fine fords. The position was gained by only a very small margin, for the ruse by which a crossing was to be attempted had been found out by the Boers, and only the superior swiftness of the British horses landed them at their destination first.

The onward march from the river was trying indeed under the tropical weather. From De Kiel's Drift, on the Riet River, General French continued towards Kimberley—a route that involved a twenty-five mile trek through arid veld. By a clever feint French caused the Boers to make for Klip Kraal Drift, on the Modder River.

General French left De Kiel's Drift in the morning with three brigades of cavalry, horse artillery, and mounted infantry, including

several colonial contingents. His object was to seize the crossing of the Modder River, some twenty-five miles distant. By the evening he had forced a passage at Klip Drift and occupied the hills on the north of the river, capturing three of the enemy's laagers with supplies. It was a brilliant feat, particularly considering the excessive heat and the blinding dust-storm which raged during the latter part of the day. Owing to the rapidity of his movements French met with but slight opposition. General French had a detachment of Marines with him, and they performed notable service. At Klip Drift, where the enemy's convoy was captured, orders were given for a twelve-pounder naval gun to be placed on the top of a kopje. One of the wheels of the gun carriage, however, gave way. With the assistance of troopers, the gun was lifted bodily and dragged over the remainder of the ground, a distance of two miles, to the top of the kopje. The horses were absolutely done up, but the bold leader pushed on.

Klip Drift was quitted at nine o'clock on the morning of the 15th, and Kimberley was

sighted at half-past two o'clock that afternoon, the city being successfully entered three hours later. 'Entered Kimberley at 6 p.m.' were the terms of the modest telegram that French despatched to the Chief of the Staff.

General French himself reconnoitred the position of the Boers, and discovered that there was just room between two kopjes for his gallant followers to make a desperate charge through the Boer lines. The dash and daring of the charge utterly bewildered the Boers. The successful passage of the narrow neck between the kopjes was heliographed to the town, and the instruction came back to enter the city by the left.

'It was,' according to the German Official Account of the war, 'the first and only time in the war that such a large body of cavalry was employed against infantry. Its brilliant success makes the participation of cavalry in battle, even against modern rifles, in no way a hopeless undertaking.' At six o'clock an officer came out from Kimberley to meet General French. Thus did French fulfil his oath made to Lord Kitchener at Modder

River, when he said: 'I promise faithfully to relieve Kimberley at six o'clock on the evening of the 15th, if I am alive.'

Kimberley had been besieged since the outbreak of hostilities early in October, and among those in the garrison was Mr Cecil Rhodes. Colonel Kekewich was in charge. The garrison was never more than 3000. It had some very trying experiences, and had made several brilliant sorties. General French found the garrison cheerful and well. The reception of the relief force by the Kimberley garrison will live in the memory of those who took part in the historic incident. Every able-bodied person turned out to greet the troops in the outskirts of the town, and crowded round the soldiers, cheering and shouting and weeping for joy. In the evening General French dined at the Kimberley Club, and a right merry dinner it was. Mr Cecil Rhodes produced a chicken, a tin of soup, and some horse-flesh, and 'The Queen' was toasted in Mr Rhodes's last bottle of champagne. General French after leaving Kimberley pursued the last remnants of the besiegers, and inflicted on them a very severe defeat at Dronfield.

About three o'clock in the morning of the 17th General French started for Koodoosrand Drift, Paardeberg, forty miles from Kimberley. The pace set was a good one, and in eight hours the trees lining the river were sighted. The General personally reconnoitred.

CHAPTER VII

PAARDEBERG AND BLOEMFONTEIN

THE following day the tireless leader set about scouring the country to the north-east of the town, where, about ten miles away, there is much high ground, upon which the Boers had massed their forces. But nothing in the way of a battle ensued. That day the British troops put in fifteen hours' hard work, and this, coupled with their persistent and strenuous four days' march, inclined to knock them up. They bivouacked in the hope of having a longer rest than usual the next day, but the hope was not to be realised.

Late at night General French received the following important message from Lord Kitchener: 'Cronje is in full retreat from

Magersfontein, with all his wagons and equipment and four guns, along the north bank of the Modder River towards Bloemfontein. Have already fought rearguard action with him. Take all available horses and guns and head him off. Infantry from Klip Drift will press on his rear, and we shall annihilate or capture the whole force.'

Cronje had, indeed, broken up his camp on the Modder River and begun to retreat towards Bloemfontein. General French threw himself across the head of the Boer General's troops. Among Cronje's army was a number of women and children, and the British made a quiet attack. Convoy was offered the non-combatants, but Cronje declined to accept it.

Cronje's force was about 2000 strong. His men were understood to be well placed in the hills, and fought desperately and well until forced by General French into the death trap at Paardeberg Drift, an action which did much to smash up the organised Boer Army. The final act took place when Cronje unconditionally surrendered. And the day upon which he did so was Majuba Day!

On the morning of the 19th Cronje had asked for a twenty-four hours' armistice to bury his dead. The request was sent on to the British Headquarters, and General French made the following characteristic reply: 'In the meantime I shall not attack your laager. Seeing that your troops are completely surrounded, I would advise you to surrender your force, and then peace will again reign in the land.' The request was rightly treated by Lord Roberts as a subterfuge to gain time, and was refused.

French's skilful manipulation of the cavalry arm of the British forces through a long series of operations culminated in the relief of Ladysmith on 3rd March, and the entry of the beleaguered city by the British troops. 'British cavalry, by God!' remarked General White, in a state of supreme excitement, born of the terrible experiences he had passed through. The little group of officers beside him were inclined, as they raised their field glasses and focussed them on the advancing troop of horse coming from the direction of the Tugela River, to be uncertain whether they belonged to the British or the Boers.

But General White was fixed in his opinion, and he proved to be correct. The horsemen were French's, and they had come, a welcome company, to raise the siege.

Bloemfontein was the next objective. Until the 6th March the Army rested at Osfontein. On that day General French moved to Bank's Drift, five miles farther on, and situated on the north side of the Modder River. It was quite dark when French moved off next morning. Galloping along, his forces appeared on the left of the Boers, and were greeted with a warm reception. Indeed, it is not too much to say that in the operations General French met with more opposition than he had anticipated. However, the speed with which the British General kept up his advance seems to have greatly impressed the Boers, who here and there began to trek. Arriving at Poplar Grove, the Commander-in-Chief divided his army into three divisions to cover the three roads to Bloemfontein.

The column entrusted to Général French was the left column, and it was made up of the 6th Division of Infantry, the 1st Cavalry Brigade, and Mounted Infantry. Advancing

along the Modder River, General French found the enemy holding several large kopjes behind Dreifontein. In a despatch home 'Bobs' described how the Boers anticipated French's manœuvre by a rapid march southward, and took up a fresh position on a ridge about four miles long, running north and south across the road, two miles east of Dreifontein. General French followed up the enemy with the First Cavalry Brigade and the Sixth Division, and came in contact with them about 11 a.m. Delarey opened fire. 'This Delarey is a fighter,' a Scots trooper wrote home, 'the best the Boers have got. He gives us a hard go every time we run against him. He is a very decent sort of chap and always treats his prisoners well.'

Arrived at Leeuwberg, and having reconnoitred the position, General French demanded that the town should surrender—the demand being conveyed by a member of the Free State Executive Council, who had been commandeered as messenger by the Scots Greys. The ultimatum created great consternation among the townspeople, who had been kept

in absolute ignorance of the real position of affairs throughout South Africa.

As evening drew in, General French made preparations for the possible fray next day. An exciting episode of the night was the blowing up of an important culvert by Major Hunter-Weston of the Royal Engineers. In the early morning the Boers shelled General French's troops. President Steyn having fled, the town unconditionally surrendered. General French's ultimatum of the previous night had contained the proviso that unless it capitulated by four o'clock the next morning he would bombard it. Accordingly the white flag was hoisted in the morning, and the Government came out to meet Lord Roberts and formally surrender to him. 'Bobs' then marched his troops into the town. As the troops marched along the streets they were greeted with the lusty singing of 'Tommy Atkins' and 'Soldiers of the King,' then popular ballads of the day. Among the prisoners was a brother of President Steyn.

Thus, as the result of General French's fine piece of work, Lord Roberts was able to wire to the Secretary of State for War:

‘By the help of God, by the bravery of Her Majesty’s soldiers, the troops under my command have taken possession of Bloemfontein.’ The march from Ramdam to Bloemfontein was a splendid piece of work, and one critic has gone so far as to say that it ‘restored the British Army in the eyes of the nation.’

Lord Roberts, in an Order congratulating the Army, thus summed up the smart work that had been accomplished. ‘On the 12th of February this force crossed the boundary which divided the Orange Free State from British territory. Three days later Kimberley was relieved. On the 15th the bulk of the Boer Army in this State, under one of their most trusted Generals, were made prisoners. On the 17th the news of the relief of Ladysmith was received, and on 13th March the capital of the Orange Free State was occupied. This is a record of which any army may well be proud—a record which could not have been achieved except by earnest, well-disciplined men, determined to do their duty and to surmount whatever difficulties or dangers might be encountered.’

Speaking at Edinburgh in 1902, General French said that at Bloemfontein it was owing to the magnificent stand throughout one long night made by that splendid regiment, the Royal Scots Greys, that the capital of the Orange Free State so rapidly fell into our possession.

In the period from the 31st March to the 27th April, General French completely upset the plans of the Boers for a great concentration in the East, followed by a raid into Natal.

A proclamation had been made out by Lord Roberts assuring the Burghers of the defeat of their army, and promising pardon to those who would at once lay down their arms. General French, in pursuance of this proclamation, was sent upon a mission to Thaba N'chu (the Black Mountain). The expedition, which started on the 18th March, arrived at its destination two days later, and received the submission of a number of the inhabitants.

French detailed Colonel Pilcher meanwhile to take possession of a famous flour mill about twenty-five miles in the direction of Ladybrand. On his way, Pilcher got word of the

advance of two large Boer commandos, so without delay he entrenched his 200 troops in a neighbouring ridge of kopjes and awaited the attack. Both commandos, however, passed by peaceably. General French later returned to Bloemfontein. Trouble arising at Glen, where a bridge spans the Modder River, it became necessary to try to put a stop to certain harrying exploits on the part of a section of the disloyal Boers.

General French was given the duty of making a detour round the enemy's right. He commanded the plain in rear of the Karee Hills with comparative ease, and thought he was in a favourable position to attack the Boers. But he had miscalculated, and for a short time his troops had rather an uncomfortable time. However, the gallant General at last found suitable ground, and set himself to carry out the movement assigned to him. But it was difficult ground, and as the troops could not move easily, the Boers had to be allowed to go.

General French commanded the cavalry of Sir George White's forces in the battle of Rietfontein, on 30th March. French's slow

but sure march thence was through dangerous-looking ridges. Meanwhile General Rundle was chafing at Rietfontein, harassed as he was by the wily De Wet. However, just as General French had reached the goal, he received the message, 'Enemy evacuated position in the night;' so that nothing now barred the way to Dewetsdorp.

French then resolved to occupy that position and to despatch a flying column to Wepener. De Wet evacuated the former position and French took possession of it. From Lord Roberts at Bloemfontein came the following message: 'French, with the cavalry, supported by Rundle and the 8th Division, to pursue at once. Chermiside and the 3rd Division to remain at Dewetsdorp, to block De Wet if he should double in his tracks and try to reach the south-east corner again. Pole-Carew and the 11th Division to return to Bloemfontein.' Accordingly on the 26th April General French moved on Thaba N'chu, his guns being all horse artillery or pom-poms, his troops all mounted, and his transport mules. Meanwhile De Wet had again escaped.

On the 28th the effort was made not merely

to defeat the Boers and cause them to evacuate Thaba N'chu, but also to capture their personnel and munitions of war. It was a plan that failed. In the meanwhile, 'Bobs' had need of the cavalry General again, and he sent for him post-haste, with the result that French arrived at Lord Roberts's camp on 8th May, doing over fifty miles in about two days. General French brought with him the First, Third, and Fourth Brigades of Cavalry. Lord Roberts's objective was the Zand River, between Karee and Kroonstad. On the 7th the force halted at Welgelegen, when a scout announced that the Boers had left a drift unoccupied. General French himself went to reconnoitre, and found Dupret's Laager Drift absolutely unoccupied, no Boers being near. Accordingly he crossed the river, and forthwith began a north-easterly march, with a view to reaching Ventersburg. The enemy were reported at Vlak Plaat. On his arrival at the Zand River, French had been instructed to make a wide turning movement on the left.

At daybreak French crossed the river, and, having reached Draksberg diamond

mines in three hours, was successful in accomplishing his commission at Vlak Plaat. Lord Roberts forced the crossing of the Zand River on the morning of the 10th May. General French moved on the west, Ian Hamilton on the east, and the headquarters were in the centre by the railway. The Boers were under the command of General Botha, and numbered about 6000, with twelve guns. Eight Boer Commandants, including De Wet and Delarey, were present. The action lasted until noon, and was brisk while it lasted. The Boers at length vacated their position.

Having chased the enemy for fourteen miles, General French's troops arrived at Ventersburg Road Station, though too late to cut off the Boer retreat. His next objective was to cut the railway behind Kroonstad—no easy task, when it is remembered that the strategic points in the vicinity were held by the enemy. However, the troops managed to dash over the Valsche River without any serious mishap. At last, on the 12th, Kroonstad was reached, and, the town surrendering, Lord Roberts rode in at the head of his troops. Thus fell the second capital of the Orange Free

State. Only about half of the horses of the cavalry were fit for much duty, so hard had they been ridden on the historic dash.

The following table shows the daily march of the army since it left Bloemfontein on the 1st May till its arrival at Kroonstad eleven days later—May 1-2, leave Bloemfontein; May 3, Brandford occupied, 35 miles; May 4, Hamilton at Welkom; May 6, across the Vet, at Smaldeel, 25 miles; May 7, at Welgellan, 15 miles; May 8, across the Zand River, 8 miles; May 10, at Reit Spruit, 5 miles; May 12, at Kroonstad, 32 miles—total 120 miles, calculated ‘as the crow flies.’

CHAPTER VIII

JOHANNESBURG, PRETORIA, AND PEACE

AND now Lord Roberts had completed his plan for the march to Pretoria. General French formed the left of the main advance, and, having camped at America Siding, he went out and personally made one of his periodical circuits of reconnaissance. East to Rhenoster Kop and then west, General

French's route led to Roodeval, fifteen miles south of the Vaal River, in reaching which he had not had the slightest trouble from the enemy.

The main body of the left column, believed to be the largest British Army that had ever hitherto taken the field, left Kroonstad at four o'clock on the morning of the 22nd May. Two days later General French had a sixteen mile ride to Parys Drift. Though the crossing was bad, he sent over the 4th Cavalry Brigade, and thus General French's troops were the first of the main body to enter the Transvaal preparatory to the surrender of Johannesburg. General French himself marched the remainder of his men to Lindique Ford, over which the 1st Cavalry Brigade and the Mounted Infantry crossed. And then the following despatch was sent to the homeland: 'The advance portion of this force crossed the Vaal on the Queen's birthday, near Parys.' Safely over, the great body of men joined in the British National Anthem. By the 27th the whole invading force were across the Vaal, and the march northwards for Rietfontein on the Klip River was begun.

On reaching Vlakfontein the Boers were found to be occupying the ridges that commanded a narrow defile, but nothing daunted, French set about gaining possession of the position, a manœuvre in which he was successful.

On the morning of 28th May he moved down the Klip River to Rietfontein, which he left the following day for Potchefstroom Drift. Having secured this excellent base for the infantry, he rested a while.

Meantime threats were made by the Boers that they would blow up Johannesburg and the Rand mines. To endeavour to prevent this, General French was ordered by the Commander-in-Chief to try to reach the north of the city, the objective being Klipriversberg, north of the Klip River and about twelve miles south of the city. French's survey of the situation on the 27th revealed two commandos under Commandant Delarey between the Vaal River and Hartebeestefontein. With Krupp guns and pom-poms the Boer General tried to delay the British forward movement. General French replied with his artillery, and a hot fight of about three hours' duration

ensued, the result being that the Boers fell back on Klipriversberg. After a much needed day's halt for rest, the forward march was resumed, and on the morning of the 28th Van Wyck's Rust was reached.

On the 28th General French was early astir, ordered urgently to hasten to Johannesburg. Off, then, he went with the intention of striking the Boers' right flank. He was met with a raking fire and replied gamely. But he had not a sufficiency of either men or guns. The next day also the fire from Delarey's men continued hot and furious. Then what must have seemed a sort of forlorn hope, a magnificent cavalry dash, was attempted. The horsemen rode fearlessly and well amid a perfect hurricane of Boer fire. The cavalry were very near to disaster this time. The objective of their dash was what appeared to be a pass through the hills. It was a blind alley, and the fact was discovered none too soon. The retirement was a very fine piece of work.

By the night of the 29th General French was north-west of Johannesburg. The surrender of the city was demanded, and in

acceptance a delay of twenty-four hours was asked, and granted. The next day General French, tireless as ever, was up betimes and had reached Dreifontein, having had several skirmishes on the way.

‘We will fight to the last. I will shed the last drop of my blood before I leave Pretoria,’ said President Paul Kruger to the townsfolk, amid frantic scenes of enthusiasm. And then he quietly disappeared.

Next to General Baden-Powell, General French was the British leader best liked by the Boers. He was also one of the best feared on account of those tireless marches and fine feats of strategy he was for ever doing. On the 3rd of June he made a thirty-two mile march to the west of Pretoria. Efforts of a determined nature were made to bar his progress, but they were all of no avail. Six Miles Spruit, the next point of call, was found by the General to be occupied by the enemy. While General Roberts was fighting in the hills outside Pretoria, General French attempted to march east to the Pietersburg railway line. But he fell into a nasty trap. A narrow defile with high hills on each side

had to be passed through. This the advance guard accomplished in safety, but the cunningly entrenched Boers opened fire on the main body. The commander's coolness carried them through.

For the next few days the advance of the British was impeded by the Boers' movements. But at last Pretoria was reached. At six o'clock on the morning of the 5th, Botha left the city, and three hours later the first of the British troops entered. The official entrance of Lord Roberts was reserved for the afternoon, and the scenes that ensued were wild in their enthusiasm. The National Anthem was sung, and three cheers were lustily given for the Queen and for the Commander-in-Chief.

In a General Order Lord Roberts referred to the great hardships inseparable from war which the troops had undergone, and heartily complimented his Army upon the result of their labours. 'The cheerful spirit with which these difficulties have been overcome,' the Order reads, 'and hardships disregarded, are deserving of the highest praise; and in thanking all ranks for their successful efforts

to attain the objects in view, Lord Roberts is proud to think that the soldiers under his command have worthily upheld the traditions of Her Majesty's Army in fighting, in marching, and in the admirable discipline which has been maintained throughout a period of no ordinary trial and difficulty.'

During his march to Pretoria, General French was frequently mentioned in despatches, and was made a Knight Commander of the Bath.

The most serious work of the war over, Sir John French's genius was shown in the masterly disposition of the forces engaged in clearing Cape Colony of rebels. Indeed, what were popularly known as the Commander-in-Chief's 'sweeping movements' provided the General with plenty of work to do, the work, needless to add, being carried through with that thoroughness and efficiency which had marked all Sir John's campaigning through the actual war. The guerilla operations which followed the entry into Pretoria were more harassing to cope with, and more dangerous to follow up, than the regular

movements of pitched battles or even frequent attacks, front or rear.

General French was the one man to cope adequately with work of the kind, and he added to the laurels he had already won in South Africa, by the manner in which he tackled the new task. The Boers were as elusive as a sportive salmon on the *qui vive*, and as wily as could be. But General French was a match for them, and they appreciated the fact, Mr Kruger's private secretary describing General French, to whom he paid a high tribute, as the De Wet of the British Army.

By a march that stretched the powers of endurance of both horses and men to the very utmost, General French's division joined Lord Roberts in his main advance, and was constantly called upon to sustained action. Just after the fall of Pretoria, Louis Botha made overtures regarding terms of settlement for himself. 'Bobs's' terms being considered too stiff, Botha gave up the idea of negotiating.

At Diamond Hill, on the 11th June, with a band of some 1800 horsemen, French was given the task of turning the Boer position

on their right. He was opposed on the first day of the battle by a force of nearly 3000 men, with seven guns, under Delarey. But he managed by a strenuous effort to hold the enemy, though in a stiff corner under heavy fire. The Boers were engaged during the following day, and on the next morning, to their surprise, the British force discovered that they had gained a victory without being aware of the fact. In the night the Boers had silently stolen away! It was a famous victory, but bought at considerable cost to both sides. The valley in the vicinity of Diamond Hill was strewn with the corpses of the combatants of both sides.

On the 23rd July General French crossed to the east of the Wilge River, and made for Middleburg via Balmoral and Naauwpoort, a line of outposts being established so as to cut off communications between Botha's forces and the Boer commandos to the west and the south of Pretoria. Six days later he rode into Middleburg.

He was on the right wing on that occasion, and at times it appeared as if Botha had singled him out for special attention. The

weather was wretched, and militated severely against the progress of the troops, who, however, kept grimly to their double task of fighting the floods and the foe. With characteristic tenacity, French stuck on, and at length won through, the Boers bolting in front of him. Stopping at Middleburg, French protected the line behind him by throwing out his troops over a forty mile front, which Botha failed altogether to penetrate.

Lord Roberts then returned to Pretoria, leaving French in charge. Carrying out his favourite plan of keeping the Boers ever on the move—a plan that was always successful—General French advanced along the Delagoa Bay Railway, taking Belfast on the 26th August, Zwart Kopjes on the next day, and Watervalonder three days later.

On the 1st September Lord Roberts issued a proclamation annexing the Transvaal to the Empire.

The trek towards Barberton has been well described as the wildest mountaineering. At parts of the way the troopers had to lead their horses down enormous declivities in

Indian file. Just before General French's arrival the Boers made a valiant attempt to destroy the Avoca Bridge. They started two locomotives, one from each end. The engines collided with great force, but the only result was the destruction of the locomotives, the bridge being left quite intact.

On the 13th September General French, who had been operating on the right of the railway, entered Barberton. By taking his cavalry across the mountains he completely surprised the enemy. As well as capturing much stock and supplies, he was the means of releasing about 100 British prisoners. Barberton was taken without a shot being fired.

Among French's captures were forty-three locomotives and some rolling stock, the former relieving the army of a great difficulty, as they had to put up previously with a limited number of very rickety engines.

At Barberton French found sufficient supplies for at least three weeks for his force and about one week for his horses. Many Mausers, much ammunition, and fifty wagons were found in the town, and there were large

quantities of cattle and sheep in the country, which was good news, as they had not been too well off lately in that respect. French intercepted large convoys, showing that Barberton had been used as a depot for the supply of the Boer troops south and south-east of that place.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the 15th the Union Jack was hoisted by Lord Algernon Lennox, and three hearty cheers were given for the Queen, for Lord Roberts, and for General French.

A proclamation issued by General French threatening to withdraw his troops and bombard the town very effectually stopped sniping.

Recent events convinced Lord Roberts that the permanent tranquillity of the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal was dependent upon the complete disarmament of the country, and, though the extent of the country to be visited and the ease with which guns, rifles, and ammunition could be hidden promised to render the task a difficult one, its accomplishment was purely a matter of time and patience.

On the 20th September Lord Roberts

issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony, pointing out the hopelessness of the struggle, and calling upon the Burghers to lay down their arms. Six days later 'Bobs' was able to wire the following cheering message to the War Office: 'There is nothing now left of the Boer Army but a few marauding bands.' But there was still the wily De Wet, slippery as the proverbial eel, to be reckoned with.

Early in October French was ordered to clear the country between the Natal and the Delagoa Bay railways. Bad weather militated against the performance of his work; but he did it well, despite the loss of a great part of his transport, owing largely to the miserable meteorological conditions prevailing.

In his march from Machadodorp to Heidelberg via Ermelo, General French had not more than 1500 men altogether. The transport formed a line about nine miles long. It was continually harassed. A start was made on 13th October, and marching to Carolina French was attacked all day, one squadron having a running fight from the start till

their arrival in camp. Carolina had just been evacuated by the Boers. The heavy marching of the last two days resulted in the loss of 380 oxen.

After a stay at Carolina of a day's duration, the force pushed on. On the 17th the force camped at the head of Watervaal, eighteen miles north of Ermelo, which was reached the next day. Ermelo was described as a pleasant town with a church, a bank, and a Boer hospital as its principal buildings. Pushing on towards Belfast the column was almost continuously sniped at, and a difficult drift had to be forced. The Boer Field-Cornet sent a message to General French threatening to take all British ambulances as a reprisal for the burning of Boer farms. Bethel being reached, General French rode round the camps and personally thanked the men for their splendid behaviour during the harassing time they were passing through. A terrible thunder-storm delayed the onward march, but at last Pretoria was reached.

In November Lord Roberts handed over the command to Lord Kitchener; a new plan of campaign was agreed upon, and General

French was placed in charge of the Johannesburg district. Before relinquishing his command 'Bobs' sent a despatch home, and in the course of it he wrote: 'Major-General J.D.P. French, as General Officer Commanding the Cavalry, has on every occasion rendered me invaluable service. He never makes difficulties, and is a man of exceptional nerve. His truly soldier-like qualities are only equalled by his sound judgment, his unerring instinct, and his perfect loyalty. His services have been of incalculable value to the Empire.'

Writing of General French's operations in the Transvaal, Lord Kitchener, in an official despatch, said: 'I placed Lieutenant-General French in command of the troops operating south and north of the Magaliesburg. The result was to drive Beyer's force eastwards across the Pretoria-Elandsfontein line on January 12. From information received and since confirmed it has transpired that the enemy's general plans at the end of 1900 were that Hertzog should proceed to Lambert's Bay, as indeed he did, and there meet a ship which the Burghers were told was bringing mercenaries, guns, and ammunition from

Europe, while De Wet was to proceed north by De Aar and join hands with Hertzog in a combined attack upon Cape Town.

‘When Commandant General Botha had heard that this concentration had been successfully effected, he was to enter Natal with a picked force of 5000 mounted men and make for Durban. In conformity with this plan a considerable concentration of Boers under Commandant-General Louis Botha and Generals T. Smuts, G. Spruyt, and P. Botha had taken place in Ermelo, Carolina, and Bethel, which districts constituted large depots of supply for the enemy’s forces. I therefore deemed it almost necessary to sweep the country between the Delagoa Bay and the Natal railway lines.

‘I entrusted the general execution of the movement to Lieutenant-General French. His column marched eastwards on the 28th January, and on the following day he forced Beyers from strong positions covering the approach to the valley of the Wilge River. On February 6, General French, having cleared the country through which he was passing, entered Ermelo. Here he received the report

of General Smith-Dorrien's severe losses. Owing to supply requirements, General French could not resume his forward movement till February 11, since which date his troops have driven the enemy in large numbers into the corner south-east of Piet Retief, his columns now holding Amsterdam and Piet Retief. . . .

'Continuous rain since February 10 in the Eastern Transvaal has hampered the movements of General French, but I have already despatched a pontoon equipment. While the intended invasion of Natal by Commandant-General Botha was thus completely frustrated, he personally, with about 3000 men, passed through General French's line at night, and moving north crossed the railway into the Roos Senekal district.'

On 28th January, as indicated, French began the great drive against General Botha, which he carried on until the hero of a thousand 'drives' took malaria, which necessitated his removal to the coast.

The operations in which General French was engaged in the south-east corner of the Transvaal were of a very difficult character.

The men, though exposed to the weather, bore all the discomforts cheerfully. Under such conditions progress was naturally very slow. It sometimes took four days to cross a drift. As the troops advanced the country was cleared of stock and inhabitants. Thousands of sheep, which were unable to keep up with the columns, perished. These operations were carried out steadily in spite of constant harassing by the enemy. Many Boers surrendered, and a large quantity of ammunition was captured.

Speaking in London shortly after his arrival home, General French said that his success in South Africa was due to the devotion, courage, skill, and ability of the troops, officers, and men, and to the inherent moral power possessed by highly trained and organised bodies of cavalry. On 31st May, 1902, just before eleven o'clock in the forenoon, peace was signed, and some time later the troops returned home, General French being specially marked out, as he well deserved, for a particularly warm welcome.

CHAPTER IX

STAFF WORK AND SPEECHMAKING

THE South African campaign had numerous lessons for the British War Office, and these were not without effect on the organisation and the tactical training of the Army. None worked harder in applying at home the lessons learnt abroad than Sir John French, whose influence, especially in regard to the cavalry section, was of beneficent value. When the war had ended, a heated controversy raged regarding the deductions of tacticians of various schools, some of whom were scornfully sceptical regarding the aggressive power and offensive strength of certain branches of the service. General French's influence in the Army went a long way towards restoring and strengthening faith in the British arms, particularly by his example 'of inculcating a relentless offensive in training his troops,' a scheme of warfare which he had successfully practised in South Africa. 'In the estimation of the Army itself and of foreign critics,' a military writer recently pointed out, 'Sir

John French is one of the greatest British Commanders since Sir Charles Napier, one whose performances are worthy of study and imitation.'

In October, 1901, Major-General French succeeded Sir Redvers Buller in the command of the First Army Corps at Aldershot, to take effect when his services were no longer required in South Africa. On his return from battling with the Boers, he took up the duties of his new Command, an office which he held with complete satisfaction to all concerned till the latter half of 1907, when he vacated it to assume the position of Inspector-General of the Forces. His appointment to the Aldershot Command was universally endorsed. 'During the five years that he held the post he may be said,' an expert wrote, 'to have reorganised the training there and to have laid the foundations of our present tactical efficiency.' Indeed, at Aldershot, he was frequently highly complimented upon his energy, and upon the wonderful way in which he led his mounted troops.

On 15th September, 1902, he was made Lieutenant-General, and he was gazetted

General on 12th February, 1907, while in the latter year, on August 13, it was announced that he had been appointed to succeed Field-Marshal the Duke of Connaught as Inspector-General of the Forces, a new post when his predecessor took it up. For four years thence he filled this appointment with energy and ability, being succeeded by Sir Charles Dóuglas. The title of the post was changed to Inspector-General of the Home Forces in August, 1910. It was understood at the time of his appointment that the position would carry with it the command of any Expeditionary Force it might be found necessary to send away in case of war. During his tenure of the office, he organised Army manœuvres in the form in which they exist to-day, to the great advantage of the land forces, his skill and up-to-dateness in the matter of war tactics being frequently matter of favourable comment from the War Office and the critics alike.

On the 13th May, 1910, Sir John sailed from Liverpool to Canada to make an official inspection, undertaken at the request of the Canadian Government, of the military forces of all branches and their equipment at all the

principal centres of the Dominion. He was accompanied by Brigadier-General D. Henderson and Major A. F. Watt. On 26th May, at Toronto, in his abrupt soldierly way, while expressing himself as greatly pleased with the smart appearance and discipline of the men, he frankly pointed out several faults that might be eliminated. Most of the cavalry work, he said, was excellent, but he laid great stress upon the value of mobile forces of mounted infantry, and urged his hearers to concentrate all their energies on horsemanship and marksmanship. In November his report on the Canadian Militia was considered by the Dominion Government, and gave rise to considerable criticism. Although some of his criticisms were severe, Canadian military men admitted that they were well founded. The General considered the Canadian militia an insufficiently developed organisation, whose higher commanders possessed inadequate knowledge.

In 1911 General French was appointed Aide-de-Camp to His Majesty the King, and Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and became First Military Member of the Army

Council. In his appointment as Chief of the General Staff, he succeeded Sir William (now Lord) Nicholson. The officer appointed to this position requires to be particularly vigilant and trustworthy. In him is vested the direction and control of the Army General Staff and details, with preparation and organisation for war intelligence, the training of the forces, their use in war, and much other important business, including the exacting duties arising from the formation and operations of the Dominions sections of the Imperial General Staff. The work was performed, under General French, with outstanding ability and thoroughness, which drew forth from everybody the highest encomiums.

On 26th March, 1913, Sir John became Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Irish Regiment. It was a compliment that he appreciated fully, and of which he has always since been justifiably proud.

A regrettable incident for all concerned was the cause of his resigning the position he held on the Army Council. A misunderstanding arose with the cavalry officers at the Curragh Camp in the spring of 1914 over

their orders in connection with the Irish Home Rule agitation and its consequences. The situation was most trying, particularly for a man who, soldier to the core, had served his country with such splendid distinction. On 31st March it was announced in the House of Commons that General French had resigned because of his having initialled, with General Sir J. S. Ewart, the document bearing upon the Curragh incident. Both officers considered this course incumbent upon them, and refused to reconsider their decision. The resignation at the time caused quite a sensation, and the Press of all shades of political opinion united in paying warm tributes to one who had been universally regarded as a gallant soldier and a fine personality.

General French has also been a member of the Territorial Force Advisory Committee. He is one of the keenest supporters of the Territorial movement, and has done much to render it popular among the young men of the country. His views of the Territorials' possibilities, before they had had an opportunity of being actively tested, were unfolded in a lecture to the London Territorial Army

Association in 1908, when he said, 'That war division will be most efficient whose component parts are trained by commanders who study and in a greater or less degree apprehend its rôle in war.'

It is hardly fair, however, as has been done, to characterise General French as an advocate of conscription or any other form of compulsory national service. On 7th May, 1913, a question was asked of the Secretary of State for War in the House of Commons whether Sir John French had stated in public that voluntary effort was quite inadequate for the due defence of these islands. Colonel Seely said that General French, to whom he had referred the question, replied, 'I have made no such public statement.' His published speeches bear out the truth of the reply.

'The South African War,' he confessed on one occasion, 'taught me the necessity for a high order of peace training. Men have to be taught to be self-reliant and to act for themselves, and that is a difficult task.' Speaking at Edinburgh, in 1902, he said, 'It is not only right, but it is absolutely essential to the safety of our great Empire, that every

subject of the King should take some part in the great work of its defence.' Six years later, addressing the Glasgow Battalion of the Boys' Brigade, he impressed the same lesson. 'The first duty of every good man,' he remarked, 'is to be patriotic and loyal, and to serve his country; to be unselfish, and to remember that his country and all concerning the good of his country should come first in his estimation. Therefore it is the duty of every good man to take a fair share in his country's defence.'

At the ceremony of the unfurling of an Empire flag at Auchterarder, he spoke to the school children regarding the matter. 'I would like to impress on all the boys and girls before me,' he said, 'that the future of their great Empire depends upon the youth of the Empire, upon boys and girls like them. The honour of the Empire is in their hands, and the future of it depends on how far and how greatly they grasp the great Imperial idea—the idea that their one duty in life is to support the greatness and glory of the Empire to which they belong.'

There is quite an Imperial touch in all these

utterances, to which added importance is attached having in regard the eminence of the great soldier from whose lips they fall. 'Do not bother your heads whether there is to be compulsory service or whether military service is to be based on a voluntary system,' he told the people of Rutherglen, in 1909; 'let each individual remember the great principle, and act up to it, that it is the duty of every one to take his fair share in his country's defence.'

Speaking in London on the question of invasion, in April, 1913, he said: 'I think our thoughts ought to be turned to so perfecting our forces that we are able to meet danger wherever it threatens at any point of the Empire. I want to make this point quite clear—that it is the nation, the Government, the Cabinet that must decide the policy of the country, but it is the soldiers and sailors who have to estimate the forces required to meet that policy. What I urge upon my countrymen is this, that they try to sum up our military needs and wants, and I urge them to take the widest and most comprehensive view of our responsibilities throughout

the whole of our great Empire, and not confine themselves to one part here and there.'

Finally, at a dinner in celebration of the anniversary of Wolfe, the Quebec hero, in January, 1914, Sir John French said: 'I have always been an ardent advocate of the principle that youths and boys who are destined to become officers in the Army should commence a special military training at the earliest possible age. The principles of war have to be known and remembered, and its practice conducted under very distracting conditions. The science of war, therefore, requires, for its successful application, to be instructive. It must, so to speak, form part of our flesh and blood, and the earlier in life this knowledge is instilled and acquired, the more instructive, valuable, and lasting is it likely to be. Moreover, if a youth commences such troubles and studies at the earliest possible age, he is much more likely to be fit to assume high command, should it come in his way, at an age when his mental and physical development is at its highest and best.'

CHAPTER X

‘THE DAY!’

It has already been stated that General French's hero of boyhood days was the great Napoleon. Had he been a seer he could not have done better in preparation for the greatest task of his lifetime. The pursuit of the life of the man who made Waterloo the finishing point of a brilliant career of campaigning naturally led the prospective General to study intimately the ground upon which the Napoleonic wars were contested—ground that Fate had destined to be watered years afterwards by the blood of brave Allies engaged in a stern life-and-death struggle against Kaiserism and the hideous shackles of an unchristian militarism. Long before he himself was called upon to lead the British arms in the greatest war of the world's history, he knew every nook and cranny of brave little Belgium.

It is hardly within the scope of the present volume to go deeply into the great European War—‘The Day!’ which has so long formed

the toast of Teutonic militarists—or its cause, except in so far as it affects the fortunes of the British arms. But it is necessary to recall that the cause was one of those comparatively small things which are ever at the root of great events. On the 28th June, 1914, the Archduke Ferdinand and his consort, the Duchess of Hohenberg, were shot dead in the streets of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. The crime appeared to have been the outcome of a pro-Serb movement, and was believed to have had its origin in Belgrade.

On the 23rd July, Austria-Hungary demanded from the Servian Government a formal assurance that it condemned the propaganda against the monarchy and the territories belonging to it. Servia's reply being considered unsatisfactory, hostilities began on the 27th July, Servian troops firing on Austro-Hungarian troops. The following day Austria declared war; and Germany, having declined Sir Edward Grey's proposals for a European conference, which had been accepted by France and Italy, declared war against Russia (which had meantime been mobilising) on the 1st August. Germany,

having invaded Luxemburg, entered French territory, and despatched an ultimatum to Russia. Great Britain, on the 4th August, sent an ultimatum to the Kaiser demanding an assurance that the neutrality of Belgium would be respected. At eleven o'clock on the same night war was declared by Britain, and, the British Army having been mobilised meantime, Lord Kitchener was appointed Secretary of State for War.

‘There are three reasons,’ explained Mr Asquith, the Prime Minister, ‘why we have gone to war. They have been stated before, but it will be useful to repeat them. We have taken up arms, in the first place, to vindicate the sanctity of treaty obligations ; in the second place, to assert and enforce the independence of free States, relatively small and weak, against the encroachment and violence of the strong ; and, finally, to withstand in the best interests of the Empire and civilisation the arrogant claim of a single Power to dominate the development and destinies of Europe.’ In short, as Lord Rosebery, on another occasion, tersely put it, ‘If we wanted to keep our Empire we had

to preserve it by war, and the present war is a fine on renewal of the lease in the British Empire.'

There are one or two remarkable features regarding personalities on the British side. General Sir John French himself, who is in charge of the British Expeditionary Force, is as popular in the land of the Gaul as he is in his own country. He had participated for some years in the French Army Manœuvres, and had made himself, by his outstanding soldierly qualities, intensely liked by the General Staff. And, incidentally, there is another tie between the French and the British forces. It was as a volunteer in the Franco-German War that the subaltern Kitchener first saw operations in the field.

Not the least interesting feature of the European War is the fact that 'the ablest General who was in the field against us in South Africa is not only Prime Minister of a united South Africa to-day, but is fighting on our side in supreme command of all the local Boer and British forces.' Among the many dramatic developments of the war the stand taken by General Botha is not the

least inspiring. And the man who is leading the British Expeditionary Force on the Continental field of battle is the General who devoted much of his energy and skill during the Boer War in an endeavour to round up Louis Botha. To his Army, indeed, Sir John French has attracted in an extraordinary degree British Colonists from every quarter of the globe; and the wonderful enthusiasm, and the fire and zeal to serve, displayed in the cause of the Motherland, have been additionally inspired by the high opinion held of his skill and prowess as a leader on the field.

It has been said, that 'with General Joffre, the Generalissimo of the operations of the Allied Armies upon the Continent, General French possesses one of the most alert military minds in Europe, being a man trained in the field and not entirely in the schoolroom.' The courage and daring and resource he has already displayed in the great work in which he is now engaged proves the truth of the very high compliment. The opinion held in the ranks regarding General French is admirably expressed in the following extract from a letter written by one of the British soldiers

serving with the Allies: 'General French is very popular with his men. There's no side about him, and when he passes along he's just as ready to smile on the ordinary Tommy as on the highest officer. He takes a keen interest in our life in the trenches, and he's dead nuts on the officers who don't take enough interest in their men. . . . He never asks the impossible from us, and always acts as though he could rely on us to get out of a tight corner. He knows we're doing our best for him and the country in this war, and he gives us credit for it. He's not one of your showmen, but a hard fighter from head to toe, and he expects every man under him to be the same. . . . He stops when he has time just to have a chat with us for the sake of finding out what we think about it all and whether we are being properly looked after.'

The announcement of the arrival of General French's army was made by the British Press Bureau in the following terms on 18th August :—

'The Expeditionary Force as detailed for foreign service has been safely landed on French soil. The embarkation, the transportation, and

the disembarkation of men and stores were alike carried through with the greatest precision and without a single casualty.'

Although this was the first public intimation of the fact, it was well known that the force was on French soil. As early as the 8th of August, preparations were afoot at Boulogne for the reception of Sir John French and his staff. Three days later the King bade farewell to the Expeditionary Force at Aldershot.

The King's message to his troops was as follows :—

‘BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

‘You are leaving home to fight for the safety and honour of my Empire. Belgium, whose country we are pledged to defend, has been attacked, and France is about to be invaded by the same powerful foe. I have implicit confidence in you, my soldiers. Duty is your watchword, and I know your duty will be nobly done.

‘I shall follow your every movement with deepest interest, and mark with eager satisfaction your daily progress. Indeed, your welfare will never be absent from my thoughts.

‘I pray God to bless you and guard you, and bring you back victorious.

‘GEORGE R.I.’

‘9th August, 1914.’

The following instructions were issued by Lord Kitchener to every soldier in the Expeditionary Army, to be kept in his active service pay-book:—

‘You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember that the honour of the British Army depends on your individual conduct. It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire, but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will for the most part take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service than in showing yourself in France and Belgium in the true character of a British soldier.

‘Be invariably courteous, considerate, and

kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property, and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act. You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted. Your conduct must justify that welcome and that trust. Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound. So keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations, and while treating all women with perfect courtesy you should avoid any intimacy.

‘Do your duty bravely. Fear God. Honour the King.’

On the 15th August they marched to their first camp on the hills above Boulogne. The arrival on French soil of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force was the signal for a great popular outburst on the part of the French people, whose enthusiasm and patriotic fervour were unbounded. As, standing on the quarter-deck of the scout *Sentinel*, General Sir John French was recognised, the cheering was deafening. The British National Anthem mingled with

the Marseillaise as the great gray warship slipped cautiously to the quayside, and the British General, smiling delightedly, walked across the gangway to the quay and saluted the cheering multitude. The Military Governor and he engaged in animated conversation for some time, and then General French proceeded to his Headquarters.

‘At the time, the *Figaro* paid this tribute to the British Commander-in-Chief:—‘French, a name of good omen. The splendid soldier, the most eminent of popular leaders among our neighbours has been placed, as every one expected in Britain and hoped in our Army, at the head of the admirable troops who bring their support to the cause of the right.’

At seven o’clock on the morning of the 17th he left Paris, proceeding by motor-car to the French Headquarters. On 19th August, from his Headquarters at Aix-la-Chapelle, the Kaiser issued a message to the German Army that, set in phraseology meant to be contemptuous, was one of the best tributes yet paid to the Expeditionary Force: ‘It is my Royal and Imperial command that you concentrate your energies for the immediate present

upon one single purpose, and that is that you address all your skill and all the valour of my soldiers to exterminate first the treacherous English, and walk over General French's contemptible little Army.'

M. Stephen Pichon, ex-Foreign Minister of France, made a spirited reply to this gibe of the Kaiser. 'What he describes as French's contemptible little army,' wrote M. Pichon, 'are several hundred thousand men whose valour and fearlessness are the admiration of the world, and who are placed under the command of one of the most illustrious military chiefs of our times. In whose name does the German Emperor attempt, without success, however, to insult these heroic upholders of justice to which they are sacrificing their lives? In the name of an army of house-breakers, hangmen, executioners, and fire-bugs, dishonoured for all time by their crimes; in the name of Imperial Princes, who found nothing more worthy of their race to do than to loot chateaux, as the Crown Prince did at Baye; in the name of generals who raised pillage to the Lord of War, like those who cleared out hotels at Compiègne.'

CHAPTER XI

MONS AND CHARLEROI

ON Saturday, 22nd August, the Expeditionary Force took the field on the French north-west frontier, after a march of thirty-one miles. Despite their long tramp, Sir John French was able to telegraph to Lord Kitchener, 'The British force is in the best of spirits.' On Saturday evening the German guns opened fire, but the real battle did not take place till the following day. The Germans were in superior numbers, yet, during the thirty-six hours the armies were in contact, Sir John French and his men 'maintained the traditions of British soldiers and behaved with the utmost gallantry,' as Lord Kitchener announced, in his capacity as Secretary of State for War, in his maiden speech to the House of Lords. The movements which the British Army had been called upon to execute demanded the greatest steadiness in the men and skill in their commanders, and the engagement has been called 'a greater Waterloo.'

According to a Paris journal, the Expeditionary Force bore the brunt of six furious attacks, made by six distinct German columns, which were all repulsed successfully.

The first line of defence was at Namur, and the taking of that town necessitated the withdrawal of a portion of the Allied troops from the line of the Sambre to their original defensive position on the French frontier. This retirement was begun on Monday, the 24th, and two days later it was announced that the British forces had successfully reached their new position. Fighting had gone on more or less continuously, but the enemy had not effectually harassed the British operations, the retirement having been executed with great skill. The position that had been assigned to General French and his forces, by Generalissimo Joffre, was one of honour and importance. Holding, as they did, the extreme left of the Allies' position, it was their duty not only to repel any frontal attack, but also to prevent any enveloping movement.

The hottest part of the engagement was that waged in the vicinity of Charleroi.

The conflict was sanguinary and prolonged. According to General French's statement, the greater part of the British casualties were sustained in the rearguard fighting during the retirement. The spirits of the troops were unaltered by the non-success of their offensive. The Napoleonic maxim has it that the mark of the truly great General is 'to know when to retreat; and to dare to do it.' 'France,' a noted Gallic writer said, 'associates' herself unanimously and wholeheartedly with the praise addressed to Sir John French and the contingent under his orders. We know what depends on them, and what burden they bore in the battle.' 'Who,' asked another, 'would not be proud to have such Allies, and what soldier would not be happy to fight with soldiers commanded by Field-Marshal French?'

Sir John French's men fought heroically at Mons. 'Men who are telling what they know of the fighting,' one correspondent wrote, 'are full of admiration for the British soldiers. Says one of them—"You should see them in a fight. What men! They don't care for the bullets. They would have licked the

Germans had they been more numerous. They were driving the Germans back when we left." The Belgian villagers also speak of the British soldiers' courage and boldness with awe and admiration.'

'The Prussian soldiers,' said another correspondent, 'fought with a bravery and a complete disregard for life that was magnificent. Time after time they hurled themselves against the British lines with a force that seemed irresistible. But every shock was repulsed by a steadiness and a bravery that, so far as one can judge, was worthy of the finest traditions of the British Army. As one German regiment after another was driven back, its place was taken by fresh troops. The flower of the German cavalry was brought into action, only to be hurled back with appalling losses. The artillery fire of the Germans was badly regulated, and less efficient than that of the British artillery, which was in position on the hills round Mons, and literally ravaged the German ranks. But it was in close contact that the British showed their superiority. Their charges with the bayonet were irresistible, and the field was

covered with mounds of dead. 'Throughout the two days the British troops stood their ground against superior numbers, never conceding an inch, cavalry and infantry equally covering themselves with glory, and fighting regardless of losses—and the losses have undoubtedly been great.'

Sights terrible in their gruesomeness met the troops when they entered Charleroi. An infantryman, in describing the ferocious street fighting, declared that the roads became so jammed with dead that the killed remained upstanding where they were shot, resting on their dead brothers. Outside an inn was to be seen the dead figure of a German officer, with head bowed over a basin, and the soap lather dry upon his face, where he had been shot in the act of washing. There was another who lay across a table, where the coffee cup, which he had been in the act of raising to his lips at the moment when death found him, lay broken on the ground.

Many daring deeds were officially reported. On the 26th August, at Le Cateau, the whole of the officers and men of one of the British batteries had been killed or

wounded, with the exception of one subaltern and two gunners. These continued to fire, and came unhurt from the battle-field. On another occasion a portion of a supply column was cut off by a detachment of German cavalry and the officer in charge was summoned to surrender. He refused, and starting his motors off at full speed, dashed safely through, losing only two lorries.

‘We are having quite a good time now,’ wrote a trooper of the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, ‘and are taking things more or less easily. Every one seems very pleased with the way things are going here, and we had a very complimentary message from General French this morning saying that our division “saved the situation,” and that our performance “ranked with the finest feats of the British Army”; all of which sounds very fine, but we didn’t know that anything very special had been done.’

According to the stories of soldiers invalided home, the British Headquarters were consistently made the object of fierce attack by the Germans, and on more than one occasion Sir John French and his Staff had very narrow

escapes, shells and shrapnel bursting in the immediate vicinity. According to one account, his Headquarters at Le Cateau were made the target for a tremendous gunfire, necessitating removal to St Quentin, where the experience of General French and his staff was the same as before.

No apology need be tendered in giving in full Sir John French's first despatch from the field of battle. It was published in a third supplement to the *London Gazette*, and was issued early on the morning of the 10th September. Its soldierly directness and picturesqueness of phraseology depict the writer in the light of one who, eschewing dry-as-dust methods in performing purely official work, can invest his story, necessarily crammed with details that can hardly be characterised as of popular interest, with a freshness and appeal that are stimulating to the imagination. The despatch, then, was as follows:—

‘The transport of the troops from England, both by sea and land, was effected in the best order and without a check. Each unit arrived at its destination in this country well within the scheduled time. The concentration

was practically complete on the evening of Friday, the 21st ult., and I was able to move the force during Saturday, 22nd, to positions I considered most favourable from which to commence operations, which the French Commander-in-Chief, General Joffre, requested me to undertake in pursuance of his plans in prosecution of the campaign.

‘The line taken up extended along the line of the canal from Conde on the west through Mons and Binche on the east. This line was taken up as follows: From Conde to Mons inclusive was assigned to the Second Corps, and to the right of the Second Corps from Mons the First Corps was posted. The 5th Cavalry Brigade was placed at Binche. In the absence of my Third Army Corps I desired to keep the Cavalry Division as much as possible as a reserve to act on my outer flank or move in support of any threatened part of the line. The forward reconnaissance was entrusted to Brigadier-General Sir Philip Chetwode with the 5th Cavalry Brigade, but I directed General Allenby to send forward a few squadrons to assist in this work.

‘During the 22nd and 23rd these advanced

squadrons did some excellent work, some of them penetrating so far as Soignies, and several encounters took place in which our troops showed to great advantage. At 6 a.m. on August 23, I assembled the commanders of the First and Second Corps and Cavalry Division at a point close to the position and explained the general situation of the Allies and what I understood to be General Joffre's plan. I discussed with them at some length the immediate situation in front of us.

'From information I received from the French Headquarters I understood that little more than one, or at the most, two, of the enemy's Army Corps, with perhaps one Cavalry Division, were in front of my position, and I was aware of an attempted outflanking movement by the enemy. I was confirmed in this opinion by the fact that my patrols encountered no undue opposition in their reconnoitring operations. The observations of my aeroplanes seemed also to bear out this estimate. About 3 p.m. on Sunday, the 23rd, reports began coming in to the effect that the enemy was commencing an attack

on the Mons line, apparently in some strength, but that the right of the position from Mons and Bray was being particularly threatened.

‘The commander of the First Corps had pushed his flank back to some high ground south of Bray, and the 5th Cavalry Brigade evacuated Binche, moving slightly south. The enemy thereupon occupied Binche. The right of the 3rd Division, under General Hamilton, was at Mons, which formed a somewhat dangerous salient, and I directed the commander of the Second Corps to be careful not to keep the troops on this salient too long, but if threatened seriously to draw back the centre behind Mons. This was done before dark.

‘In the meantime, about 5 p.m., I received a most unexpected message from General Joffre by telegraph, telling me that at least three German Corps—viz., a Reserve Corps, the 4th Corps, and the 9th Corps—were moving on my position in front, and that the Second Corps was engaged in a turning movement from the direction of Tournay. He also informed me that the two reserve French divisions, the 5th French Army on my right,

were retiring, the Germans on the previous day gaining possession of the passages of the Sambre between Charleroi and Namur. In view of the possibility of my being driven from the Mons position, I had previously ordered a position in the rear to be reconnoitred. This position rested on the fortress of Maubeuge on the right, and extended west to Jenlain, south-east of Valenciennes, on the left. The position was reported difficult to hold, because standing crops and buildings made the sitting of trenches very difficult and limited the field of fire in many important localities. It nevertheless afforded a few good artillery positions.

‘When the news of the retirement of the French and the heavy German threatening on my front reached me I endeavoured to confirm it by aeroplane reconnaissance, and as a result of this I determined to effect a retirement to the Maubeuge position at daybreak on the 24th. A certain amount of fighting continued along the whole line throughout the night, and at daybreak on the 24th, the Second Division from the neighbourhood of Harmignies made a powerful

demonstration as if to retake Binche. This was supported by the artillery of both the First and Second Divisions, while the First Division took up the supporting position in the neighbourhood of Peissant. Under cover of this demonstration the Second Corps retired on the line Dour-Quarouble-Frameries. The Third Division on the right of the corps suffered considerable loss in this operation from the enemy, who had retaken Mons.

‘The Second Corps halted on this line, where they partially entrenched themselves, enabling Sir Douglas Haig with the First Corps gradually to withdraw to the new position, and he effected this without much further loss, reaching the line Bavai-Maubeuge about 7 p.m. Towards midday the enemy appeared to be directing his principal effort against our left. I had previously ordered General Allenby with the cavalry to act vigorously to take the pressure off.

‘About 7.30 a.m. General Allenby received a message from Sir Charles Fergusson, commanding the 5th Division, saying that he was very hard pressed and in urgent need of support. On receipt of this message General

Allenby drew in the cavalry and endeavoured to bring direct support to the 5th Division. During the course of this operation, General de Lisle, of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, thought he saw a good opportunity to paralyse the further advance of the enemy's infantry by making a mounted attack on his flank. He formed up and advanced for this purpose, but was held up by wire about 500 yards from his objective, and the 9th Lancers and the 18th Hussars suffered severely in the retirement of the brigade. The 19th Infantry Brigade, which had been guarding the line of communications, was brought up by rail to Valenciennes on the 22nd and 23rd. On the morning of the 24th they were moved out to a position south of Quarouble to support the left flank of the Second Corps. With the assistance of the cavalry Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien was enabled to effect his retreat to a new position, although having two corps of the enemy on his front and one threatening his flank. He suffered great losses in doing so.

'At nightfall the position was occupied by the Second Corps to the west of Bavai, the

First Corps to the right. The right was protected by the fortress of Maubeuge, the left by the 19th Brigade in position between Jenlain and Bry, and the cavalry on the outer flank. The French were still retiring, and I had no support except such as was afforded by the fortress of Maubeuge, and the determined efforts of the enemy to get round my left flank assured me that it was his intention to jam me against that place and surround me. I felt that not a moment must be lost in retiring to another position. I had every reason to believe that the enemy's forces were somewhat exhausted, and I knew that they had suffered heavy losses. I hoped, therefore, that his pursuit would not be too vigorous to prevent me effecting my object. The operation, however, was full of danger and difficulty, not only owing to the very superior force in my front, but also to the exhaustion of the troops.

'The retirement was recommenced in the early morning of the 25th to a position in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau, and rear-guards were ordered to be clear of the Maubeuge-Bavai-Eth road by 5.30 a.m. Two

cavalry brigades, with the divisional cavalry of the Second Corps, covered the movement of the Second Corps. The remainder of the cavalry division with the 19th Brigade, the whole under the command of General Allenby, covered the west flank.

‘The Fourth Division commenced its de-trainment at Le Cateau on Sunday, the 23rd, and by the morning of the 25th eleven battalions and a brigade of artillery with divisional staff were available for service. I ordered General Snow to move out to take up a position with his right south of Solesmes, his left resting on the Cambrai-Le Cateau road south of La Chaprei. In this position the division rendered great help to the effective retirement of the Second and First Corps to the new position. Although the troops had been ordered to occupy the Cambrai-Le Cateau-Landrecies position and the ground had during the 25th been partially prepared and entrenched, I had grave doubts, owing to the information I received as to the accumulating strength of the enemy against me, as to the wisdom of standing there to fight.

‘Having regard to the continued retirement

of the French on my right, my exposed left flank, the tendency of the enemy's western corps (to envelop me), and, more than all, the exhausted condition of the troops, I determined to make a great effort to continue the retreat till I could put some substantial obstacle, such as the Somme or the Oise, between my troops and the enemy, and afford the former some opportunity of rest and reorganisation. Orders were therefore sent to the corps commanders to continue their retreat as soon as they possibly could towards the general line Vermand-St Quentin-Ribemont. The cavalry, under General Allenby, were ordered to cover the retirement. Throughout the 25th and far into the evening the First Corps continued its march on Landrecies, following the road along the eastern border of the Forêt de Mormal, and arrived at Landrecies about ten o'clock. I had intended that the corps should come farther west, so as to fill up the gap between Le Cateau and Landrecies, but the men were exhausted, and could not get farther in without rest.

'The enemy, however, would not allow them this rest, and about 9.30 p.m. a report was

received that the 4th Guards Brigade in Landrecies was heavily attacked by troops of the 9th German Army Corps, who were coming through the forest on the north of the town. This Brigade fought most gallantly, and caused the enemy to suffer tremendous loss in issuing from the forest into the narrow streets of the town. This loss has been estimated from reliable sources at from 700 to 1000. At the same time, information reached me from Sir Douglas Haig that his 1st Division was also heavily engaged south and east of Maroilles. I sent urgent messages to the commander of the two French Reserve Divisions on my right to come up to the assistance of the First Corps, which they eventually did. Partly owing to this assistance, but mainly to the skilful manner in which Sir Douglas Haig extricated his corps from an exceptionally difficult position in the darkness of the night, they were able at dawn to resume their march south towards Wassignyon-Guise.

‘By about 6 p.m. the Second Corps had got into position, with their right on Le Cateau, their left in the neighbourhood of Gaudry,

and the line of defence was continued thence by the 4th Division towards Seranvillers, the left being thrown back. During the fighting on the 24th and 25th the cavalry became a good deal scattered, but by the early morning of the 26th General Allenby had succeeded in concentrating two brigades to the south of Cambrai. The 4th Division was placed under the orders of the General Officer commanding the Second Army Corps. On the 24th the French Cavalry Corps, consisting of three Divisions under General Sordet, had been in billets north of Avesnes. On my way back from Bavai, which was my 'Poste de Commandement' during the fighting of the 23rd and 24th, I visited General Sordet and earnestly requested his co-operation and support. He promised to obtain sanction from his Army Commander to act on my left flank, but said that his horses were too tired to move before the next day. Although he rendered me valuable assistance later on in the course of the retirement, he was unable, for the reasons given, to afford me any support on the most critical day of all, viz., the 26th.

'At daybreak it became apparent that the

enemy was throwing the bulk of his strength against the left of the position occupied by the Second Corps and the Fourth Division. At this time the guns of four German Army Corps were in position against them, and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien reported to me that he judged it impossible to continue his retirement at daybreak (as ordered) in face of such an attack. I sent him orders to use his utmost endeavours to break off the action and retire at the earliest possible moment, as it was impossible for me to send him any support, the First Corps being at the moment incapable of movement. The French Cavalry Corps under General Sordet was coming up on our left rear early in the morning, and I sent an urgent message to him to do his utmost to come up and support the retirement of my left flank, but owing to the fatigue of his horses he found himself unable to intervene in any way. There had been no time to entrench the position properly, but the troops showed a magnificent front to the terrible fire which confronted them.

‘The artillery, although outmatched by at least four to one, made a splendid fight, and

inflicted heavy losses on their opponents. At length it became apparent that if complete annihilation was to be avoided, a retirement must be attempted, and the order was given to commence it about 3.30 p.m. The movement was covered with the most devoted intrepidity and determination by the artillery, which had itself suffered heavily, and the fine work done by the cavalry assisted materially in the final completion of this most difficult and dangerous operation. Fortunately the enemy had himself suffered too heavily to engage in an energetic pursuit.

‘I cannot close the brief account of this glorious stand of the British troops without putting on record my deep appreciation of the valuable services rendered by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the Army under my command on the morning of the 26th August could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operation.

‘The retreat was continued far into the

night of the 26th and through the 27th and 28th, on which date the troops halted on the line Noyon-Chauny-La-Fere, having then thrown off the weight of the enemy's pursuit. On the 27th and 28th I was much indebted to General Sordet and the French Cavalry Division which he commands for materially assisting my retirement and successfully driving back some of the enemy on Cambrai. General d'Amade also, with the 61st and 62nd French Reserve Divisions, moved down from the neighbourhood of Arras on the enemy's right flank and took much pressure off the rear of the British forces.

'This closes the period covering the heavy fighting which commenced at Mons on Sunday afternoon, August 23, and which really constituted a four days' battle.

'I deeply deplore the very serious losses which the British forces have suffered in this great battle, but they were inevitable, in view of the fact that the British Army—only two days after a concentration by rail—was called upon to withstand a vigorous attack of five German Army Corps. It is impossible for me to speak too highly of the

skill evinced by the two general officers commanding the Army Corps, the self-sacrificing and devoted exertion of their staffs, the direction of the troops by divisional, brigade, and regimental leaders, the command of the smaller units by their officers, and the magnificent fighting spirit displayed by non-commissioned officers and men.'

CHAPTER XII

BATTLE OF THE MARNE

It had been intended to resume the retirement at daybreak on the 26th, but the German attack, in which no fewer than five corps were engaged, was so close and fierce that it was not possible to carry out this intention until the afternoon. The fighting was again of the most severe and desperate character. The troops offered a superb and most stubborn resistance to the tremendous odds with which they were confronted, and at length extricated themselves in good order, though with serious losses and under the heaviest artillery fire. For several days subsequently the British

troops were unmolested, a fact which enabled them to rest and refit for the next great tussle.

The transference of the French Government to Bordeaux took place on the 3rd September, and the announcement was made, with the German cavalry advance guards reported thirty miles from Paris, that the capital would be defended with the utmost vigour. On the morning of 6th September, the great struggle for the possession of the city began. An enveloping movement upon the Franco-British left wing failed, and the Allied forces at once assumed the offensive in the first real sustained trial of strength between the armies, which will probably go down in history as the battle of the Marne. On the evening of 10th September it ended in the precipitate flight of the enemy. In this great engagement the British Army south of the Marne were entrusted with the task of moving against General von Kluck's right.

From the first day the advanced columns of that section of the German battle-front turned back, and, according to *Le Temps*, thanks to the subsequent German move, the

British Army was left free to straighten its lines northwards of the Ourcq, and to attack from there the German Army which from that time confronted General Maunoury. General d'Esperey's Army on the right of the British Army supported its effort, and by a vigorous offensive threw back upon the Marne the left of Von Kluck's Army and the right of General von Bülow's Army. The victory was all the more remarkable, as it had been won by troops which had been retreating for two weeks. At times the retreat of the German Army resembled a rout, and the British force pursued the Teuton right for miles. Little wonder British officers from the front on the day before the announcement of the great victory reported that 'Sir John French seemed very satisfied as he walked through the lines smoking a cigarette.'

General French's second despatch described the battle of the Marne in graphic style. 'On the evening of the 26th August,' he wrote, 'the retirement of the force was followed closely by two of the enemy's cavalry columns moving south-east from St Quentin. The retreat in this part of the field was being

covered by the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades. South of the Somme, General Gough, with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, threw back the Uhlans of the Guard with considerable loss. General Chetwode, with the 5th Cavalry Brigade, encountered the eastern column near Cerizy, moving south. The brigade attacked and routed the column, the leading German regiment suffering very severe casualties and being almost broken up. The 7th French Army Corps was now in course of being railed up from south to the east of Amiens. On the 29th it nearly completed its detrainment, and the French 6th Army got into position on my left, its right resting on Roye. The 5th French Army was behind the line of the Oise, between La Fère and Guise. The pursuit of the enemy was very vigorous. Some five or six German corps were on the Somme facing the 5th Army on the Oise. At least two corps were advancing towards my front, and were crossing the Somme east and west of Ham. Three or four more German corps were opposing the 6th French Army on my left.

‘This was the situation at one o’clock on the 29th, when I received a visit from General

Joffre at my Headquarters. I strongly represented my position to the French Commander-in-Chief, who was most kind, cordial, and sympathetic, as he has always been. He told me that he had directed the 5th French Army on the Oise to move forward and attack the Germans on the Somme with a view to checking pursuit. He also told me of the formation of the 6th French Army on my left flank, composed of the 7th Army Corps, four reserve divisions, and Sordet's Corps of Cavalry. I finally arranged with General Joffre to effect a further short retirement towards the line Compiègne-Soissons, promising him, however, to do my utmost to keep always within a day's march of him. In pursuance of this arrangement the British forces retired to a position a few miles north of the line Compiègne-Soissons on the 29th.

'The right flank of the German Army was now reaching a point which appeared seriously to endanger my line of communications with Havre. I had already evacuated Amiens, into which place a German reserve division was reported to have moved. Orders were given to change the base to St Nazaire, and establish

an advance base at Le Mans. This operation was well carried out by the Inspector-General of Communications. In spite of a severe defeat inflicted upon the Guard 10th and Guard Reserve Corps of the German Army by the 1st and 3rd French Corps on the right of the 5th Army, it was not part of General Joffre's plan to pursue this advantage, and a general retirement on to the line of the Marne was ordered, to which the French forces in the more eastern theatre were directed to conform.

'A new Army (the 9th) had been formed from three corps in the south by General Joffre and moved into the space between the right of the 5th and left of the 4th Armies. Whilst closely adhering to his strategic conception to draw the enemy on at all points until a favourable situation was created from which to assume the offensive, General Joffre found it necessary to modify from day to day the methods by which he sought to attain this object, owing to the development of the enemy's plans and changes in the general situation. In conformity with the movements of the French forces, my retirement continued

practically from day to day. Although we were not severely pressed by the enemy, rearguard actions took place continually.

‘On September 1, when retiring from the thickly wooded country to the south of Compiègne, the 1st Cavalry Brigade was overtaken by some German cavalry. They momentarily lost a Horse Artillery battery, and several officers and men were killed and wounded. With the help, however, of some detachments from the 3rd Corps, operating on their left, they not only recovered their own guns, but succeeded in capturing twelve of the enemy’s. Similarly to the eastward the 1st Corps, retiring south also, got into some very difficult forest country, and a somewhat severe rearguard action ensued at Villers-Cotterets, in which the 4th Guards Brigade suffered considerably. On September 3 the British forces were in position south of the Marne, between Lagny and Signy-Signets.

‘Up to this time I had been requested by General Joffre to defend the passages of the river as long as possible, and to blow up the bridges in my front. After I had made the necessary dispositions and the destruction of

the bridges had been effected, I was asked by the French Commander-in-Chief to continue my retirement to a point some twelve miles in the rear of the position I then occupied, with a view to taking up a second position behind the Seine. This retirement was duly carried out. In the meantime, the enemy had thrown bridges and crossed the Marne in considerable force, and was threatening the Allies all along the line of the British forces, and the 5th and 9th French Armies. Consequently several small outpost actions took place.

‘On Saturday, September 5, I met the French Commander-in-Chief at his request, and he informed me of his intention to take the offensive forthwith, as he considered the conditions were very favourable to success. General Joffre announced to me his intention of wheeling up the left flank of the 6th Army, pivoting on the Marne, and directing it to move on the Ourcq, cross and attack the flank of the 1st German Army, which was then moving in a south-easterly direction east of that river. He requested me to effect a change of front to my right—my left resting on the Marne and my right on the 5th Army—to fill

the gap between that army and the 6th. I was then to advance against the enemy in my front and join in the general offensive movement.

‘These combined movements practically commenced on Sunday, September 6, at sunrise, and on that day, it may be said, that a great battle opened on a front extending from Ermenonville to a point north of the fortress of Verdun. This battle, in so far as the 6th French Army, the British Army, the 5th French Army, and the 9th French Army were concerned, may be said to have concluded on the evening of September 10, by which time the Germans had been driven back to the line Soissons-Rheims, with a loss of thousands of prisoners, many guns, and enormous masses of transport.

‘About September 3 the enemy appears to have changed his plans and to have determined to stop his advance south direct upon Paris, for, on September 4, air reconnaissances showed that his main columns were moving in a south-easterly direction, generally east of a line drawn through Nanteuil and Lizy on the Ourcq. On September 5 several of these columns were observed to have crossed the

Marne, whilst German troops which were observed moving south-east up the left bank of the Ourcq on September 4 were now reported to be halted and facing that river. Heads of the enemy's columns were seen crossing at Changis, Le Ferté, Nogent, Château-Thierry, and Mézy. Considerable German columns of all arms were seen to be converging on Montmirail, whilst before sunset large bivouacs of the enemy were located in the neighbourhood of Coulommiers, south of Rebais, La Ferté-Gaucher, and Dagny. I should conceive it to have been about noon on September 6, after the British forces had changed their front to the right and occupied the line Jouy-Le Chatel-Faremoutiers-Villeneuve le Comte, and the advance of the 6th French Army north of the Marne towards the Ourcq became apparent, that the enemy realised the powerful threat that was being made against the flank of his columns moving south-east, and began the great retreat which opened the battle above referred to.

‘On the evening of September 6, therefore, the fronts and positions of the opposing armies were roughly as follows :—

'ALLIES.

'6th French Army—Right on the Marne at Meux, left towards Betz.

'British forces—On the line Dagny-Coulommiers-Maison.

'5th French Army—At Courtagon, right on Esternay.

'Conneau's Cavalry Corps, between the right of the British and the left of the French 5th Army.

'GERMANS.

'4th Reserve and 2nd Corps, east of the Ourcq, and facing that river.

'9th Cavalry Division, west of Crégy.

'2nd Cavalry Division, north of Coulommiers.

'4th Corps, Rebais.

'3rd and 7th Corps, south-west of Montmirail.

'All these troops constituted the 1st German Army, which was directed against the French 6th Army on the Ourcq and the British forces, and the left of the 5th French Army south of the Marne. The 2nd German Army (IX., X., X.R., and Guard) was moving against the centre and right of the 5th French Army and

the 9th French Army. On September 7, both the 5th and 6th French Armies were heavily engaged on our flank. The 2nd and 4th Reserve German Corps on the Ourcq vigorously opposed the advance of the French towards that river, but did not prevent the 6th Army from gaining some headway; the Germans themselves suffered serious losses. The French 5th Army threw the enemy back to the line of the Petit Morin River, after inflicting severe losses upon them, especially about Montceaux, which was carried at the point of the bayonet.

‘The enemy retreated before our advance, covered by his 2nd and 9th and Guard Cavalry Divisions, which suffered severely. Our cavalry acted with great vigour, especially General de Lisle’s Brigade with the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars. On September 8 the enemy continued his retreat northward, and our army was successfully engaged during the day with strong rearguards of all arms on the Petit Morin River, thereby materially assisting the progress of the French armies on our right and left, against whom the enemy was making his greatest efforts. On both sides the enemy

was thrown back with very heavy loss. The First Army Corps encountered stubborn resistance at La Tretoire (north of Rebais). The enemy occupied a strong position with infantry and guns on the northern bank of the Petit Morin River; they were dislodged with considerable loss. Several machine guns and many prisoners were captured, and upwards of 200 German dead were left on the ground. The forcing of the Petit Morin at this point was much assisted by the cavalry and the 1st Division, which crossed higher up the stream.

‘Later in the day a counter-attack by the enemy was well repulsed by the First Army Corps, a great many prisoners and some guns again falling into our hands. On this day (September 8) the Second Army Corps encountered considerable opposition, but drove back the enemy at all points with great loss, making considerable captures. The Third Army Corps also drove back considerable bodies of the enemy’s infantry and made some captures. On September 9 the First and Second Army Corps forced the passage of the Marne, and advanced some miles to the north of it. The Third Corps encountered

considerable opposition, as the bridge at La Ferté was destroyed, and the enemy held the town on the opposite bank in some strength, and thence persistently obstructed the construction of a bridge, so the passage was not effected until after nightfall.

‘During the day’s pursuit the enemy suffered heavy loss in killed and wounded; some hundreds of prisoners fell into our hands, and a battery of eight machine guns was captured by the 2nd Division. On this day the 6th French Army was heavily engaged west of the River Ourcq. The enemy had largely increased his force opposing them, and very heavy fighting ensued, in which the French were successful throughout. The left of the 5th French Army reached the neighbourhood of Château-Thierry after most severe fighting, having driven the enemy completely north of the river with great loss. The fighting of this army in the neighbourhood of Montmirail was very severe.

‘The advance was resumed at daybreak on the 10th, on the line of the Ourcq, opposed by strong rearguards of all arms. The 1st and 2nd Corps, assisted by the Cavalry Division

on the right and the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades on the left, drove the enemy northwards. Thirteen guns, seven machine guns, about 2000 prisoners, and quantities of transport fell into our hands. Although I deeply regret to have had to report heavy losses in killed and wounded throughout these operations, I do not think they have been excessive, in view of the magnitude of the great fight, the outlines of which I have only been able very briefly to describe, and the demoralisation and loss in killed and wounded which are known to have been caused to the enemy by the vigour and severity of the pursuit.'

Concluding his despatch, General French draws special attention to the fact that from Sunday, the 23rd August, up to the 17th September, from Mons back almost to the Seine, and from the Seine to the Aisne, the Army under his command was ceaselessly engaged, without one single day's halt or rest of any kind.

CHAPTER XIII

BATTLE OF THE AISNE

THE battle of the Aisne, destined to be the longest and most stubbornly fought pitched battle in British history, began on the evening of 12th September, and throughout the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Expeditionary Force behaved with splendid daring. The passage of the Aisne was effected on the second day of the fray, against the most desperate counter-attacks and a hail of heavy artillery. 'I am unable,' wrote Sir John in his first despatch reporting the battle, 'to find adequate words in which to express the admiration I feel for their magnificent conduct. The French Armies on our right and left are making good progress, and I feel sure that we have only to hold on with tenacity to the ground we have won for a very short time longer, when the Allies will be again in full pursuit of a beaten enemy. The self-sacrificing devotion and splendid spirit of the British Army in France will carry all before it.'

A day or two later, Lord Kitchener stated in the House of Lords that 'the tide has now turned, and for some days past we have received the gratifying intelligence of the forced retirement of the German Armies. . . . Although we have grounds for quiet confidence, it is only right that we should remind ourselves that the struggle is bound to be a long one.' In reply, the Marquis of Lansdowne said: 'We regard with the profoundest admiration and with the profoundest gratitude what the noble Field-Marshal described as the great feat of arms which has been accomplished by the British Force since its arrival at the seat of war. We also share the feeling with the immense services rendered by Sir John French.'

About the same time there was published a tribute to the British Field-Marshal's prowess from an unexpected quarter: 'Rotterdam.—A trustworthy informant hears from an excellent source that the German General Staff recognise that they greatly underestimated the fighting value of the British Army. They have expressed great admiration for Sir John French's generalship.' In the face of terrific bombardment and violent

onslaught the Allied Armies continued to make progress by degrees. That the Germans had changed their opinion of General French's 'contemptible little army' is proved by extracts from documents obtained from captured prisoners. 'With the British troops,' ran one of these, 'we had great difficulties. They have a queer way of causing losses to the enemy. They make good trenches, in which they wait patiently. They carefully measure the ranges for their rifle fire, and they then open a truly hellish fire on the unsuspecting cavalry. This was the reason that we had such heavy losses. According to our officers the British striking forces are exhausted. The British people never really wanted war.' Another document read: 'The British are very brave, and fight to the last man. One of our companies has lost 130 men out of 240.'

An incident of the great battle, small in itself but of considerable significance as showing the great respect of the French for the British leader, was the handing over to Sir John French of a German flag. This interesting trophy of the world's greatest battle was found under a heap of bodies in some trenches.

'Shells were flying all round us, and they looked like small barrels of beer in the air before they burst,' is the simile employed by another combatant in describing the scene at the Aisne. A captured German officer told a Scottish officer that the enemy had been extraordinarily surprised at the way the British troops fought, as they had been led to believe that the British troops were of no use at all. The German officers were also much impressed by the use the British Army made of cover. 'They creep up and up,' said one captured officer, 'but you never see them.'

In an official despatch, published during the last week of October, General French brought the story of his army's work in the field down to the 8th of that month, when the enveloping movement round General von Kluck's army was developing. 'It forms,' as a *Daily Chronicle* commentator truly said, 'a glowing page in the annals of the British Army, and tells how, time and again, Germans hurled themselves against our ranks, only to be beaten back each time with considerable losses.' Between the 12th September and the 8th October, General French mentioned,

the British casualties totalled 561 officers and 12,980 men ; and, as an official despatch of the 7th September gave the estimated casualties to that date at 15,000 officers and men, the aggregate estimated loss to the 8th October was thus over 28,000.

Popularly known as 'Silent French,' because he talks so little—one of his maxims is the good old-fashioned 'deeds, not words'—Sir John has, nevertheless, in his despatches from the front, proved the possessor of the happy knack of saying just the right thing. Towards the end of September the *New York World* paid him a very high tribute, which is well merited. In an editorial article that leading journal of American opinion praised in the highest terms the absolute fairness and clearness of all of Sir John French's statements from the war zone. 'His reports,' says this journal, 'are so simply and clearly written that they strongly convey the impression of absolute reliability. They will form the backbone of the history of British participation in the war which will presently be written.'

And Lord Kitchener, in a speech in the House of Lords, said : 'The quiet restraint of

Sir John French's account of the achievements of the heroic Expeditionary Force only brings into relief the qualities which enable our troops successfully to carry out the most difficult of all military operations. There is, however, one aspect of this feat of arms upon which the despatch is naturally silent. I refer to the consummate skill and calm courage of the Commander-in-Chief himself in the conduct of his strategical withdrawal in the face of vastly superior forces. His Majesty's Government appreciate to the full the value of the service which Sir J. French has rendered to his country, and to the cause of the Allies, and I may perhaps be permitted here and now on their behalf to pay a tribute to his leadership, as well as to the marked ability of the Generals under his command, and the bravery and endurance of the officers and men of the Expeditionary Force.'

Sir John French's British honours include G.C.B. (1909); G.C.V.O. (1905); K.C.M.G. (1902). He is an honorary LL.D. of Cambridge and an honorary D.C.L. of Oxford. Among foreign honours he holds the Cross of the Red Eagle of Prussia, the insignia of

a Grand Officer of the French Legion of Honour, the Cross of the Iron Crown of Austria, the Order of Alexander Nevsky of Russia, the Military Order of Merit, Spain, and the Dannebrog of Denmark.

When Sir Evelyn Wood first saw Sir John French, then a junior officer, he asked, 'What value?' 'For ever reading books,' was the reply. Sir John French has been reading ever since—his favourite author is Charles Dickens—but he had shown he could put his knowledge to brilliant practical use. Doubtless in the course of his reading he has come across Abraham Lincoln's famous war motto : 'With malice towards none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right—let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up this nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace.' Surely an excellent resolve for all true Britons in their endeavour to hunt down 'the apache of nations' in the trying time of Armageddon.

Admiral Jellicoe

CHAPTER I

EGYPT AND THE 'VICTORIA'

'THOUGH Admiral Jellicoe never served with him, Lord Charles Beresford knows Admiral Jellicoe to be the right man in the right place.' In these glowing words the man who ranks as one of the foremost all-round naval authorities of the day writes, in a personal note, of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Grand Fleet. It is a noble tribute that Lord Charles pays to Sir John, and it is not the first time he has thus referred to him. Speaking quite recently, Lord Charles told his audience: 'You have not got a better man in the whole country than Sir John Jellicoe. The Fleet will never fail you.'

The blood of those that go down to the sea in ships is in Admiral Sir John Rushworth Jellicoe. At the time of Trafalgar, a relative

of his, Admiral Patton, was Second Sea Lord, the same post that Admiral Jellicoe held till he took over command of the Grand Fleet; and his little daughter, born in 1913, when he was Second Sea Lord, was called Patton, after her great-great-grandfather.

Admiral Jellicoe's father was Captain John H. Jellicoe, a popular Southampton man, prominently identified with the mercantile marine, and a well-kent figure, up till his death in September, 1914, in the busy port. Captain Jellicoe was for long Commodore of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company's fleet, and had latterly held a seat on the Board of Directors. The son who was fated to become one of Britain's most famous Admirals was born on the 5th December, 1859. It was only natural that as a lad young Jellicoe should feel an irresistible attraction in the call of the sea, and the attraction was doubtless nurtured and fostered by the glowing tales of other lands which his father, at the end of a long voyage, never seemed tired of telling. Young Jellicoe was sent to school at Rottingdean, and proved an apt pupil, displaying particular interest in everything that appertained in any

way to the sea or to seafaring life. He remained at school till he was thirteen years of age, and then began his training proper for the service which he has so worthily adorned.

Fired with all the burning enthusiasm and verve of a lad sprung from a seafaring stock, John Jellicoe entered the Royal Navy as a cadet on the 15th July, 1872, and on the *Britannia* training ship he read and listened to and studied with avidity everything he could lay his hands upon that in any way had reference to the calling which he adopted. They were happy days aboard the great training ship, and young Jellicoe left it at last with the determination that he would prove himself to be worthy of all the best traditions of a noble service. He began by passing out of the *Britannia* first of his class, by over one hundred marks, having taken top place in all the examinations and gained the maximum number of prizes. His smartness and ability also told in his favour in his examination for a Sub-Lieutenancy, and he was successful in gaining the rank on the 5th December, 1878, taking three first prizes—a

fact that was commented upon as an achievement of a remarkable character. It was only natural, after having done so well, that he should attract more attention than usual. Promotion came comparatively rapidly, and on the 23rd August, 1880, he was appointed a Lieutenant, with three first-class certificates. Two years later Lieutenant Jellieoe had his first experience of active service, when, on H.M.S. *Agincourt*, he was present during part of the Egyptian Wars. At this time the *Agincourt* was attached to the Channel Squadron.

In the beginning of 1882 there was much disquiet in Egypt, and when, in May, Arabi rebelled against the Khedive, foreign intervention became essential, and two ships of the Mediterranean Squadron were ordered to Alexandria. As things did not look at all well, orders were given to the whole squadron to follow. France declined to join Britain in her main object, which was to secure the Suez Canal from seizure by the revolting Arabi, and Britain resolved herself to take energetic measures to that end. By June a considerable fleet of warships was in Egyptian waters,

and the Channel Squadron received orders to proceed to Malta as a support if required. On the 22nd June the *Agincourt* arrived at Malta from Gibraltar, and the young Lieutenant was as eager as any of the personnel to assist in laying the boastful Arabi by the heels.

In the meantime the supporters of Arabi were gathering in strength and menacing Alexandria. Matters looked so serious that, at the beginning of July, Admiral Sir Beauchamp Seymour thought it necessary to demand that the movement should cease. Arabi's reply was of an evasive nature, and an ultimatum from the British Commander followed, but was ineffective. Accordingly, on the 11th July, the forts were bombarded. The *Agincourt* was not at the bombardment of Alexandria. Shortly before, she had arrived with the third battalion of the 60th Rifles. For some time after the bombardment, Cairo and the rest of Egypt remained quiet watching events. But all was not yet over. On the 13th the *Agincourt* arrived at Limasol from Malta, and the following day again left for Egypt. The British Admiral wanted Arabi

to be declared a rebel by Tewfik Pasha, the Khedive. But Arabi still went on his defiant way, and it was necessary to keep at him still further. Owing to rumours of interference with the Suez Canal, the *Agincourt* proceeded to Port Said, where she arrived on the 25th, but found all quiet. Early in August, while the *Agincourt* was still on guard at Port Said, the town was occupied by British Marines and Bluejackets. Ismailia was next taken possession of, and the whole of the Suez Canal thus fell entirely under British control.

On the 13th September Arabi was crushingly defeated at Tel-el-Kebir, and the next day the British troops occupied Cairo, thus restoring the Khedive to authority. Just previously, trouble seemed to be threatened at Damietta, and the squadron at Port Said had orders to attack the town. However, the carrying out of this order proved to be unnecessary, and the town, which had been watched by the *Agincourt* and the *Northumberland*, surrendered. All those who took part in the Expedition were awarded a silver medal, and in addition Lieutenant Jellicoe was granted the Khedive's Bronze Star—his two first medals.

Home again, Lieutenant Jellicoe pursued those studies which the little excursion to Egypt had slightly interrupted. He attended the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and in the year following his first war experience he carried off the special £80 prize for gunnery lieutenants, with work that was characterised at the time as outstandingly good. Then began the specialisation in gunnery and ordnance, upon which subjects Jellicoe was to become recognised as one of the foremost practical experts of the day. Shortly afterwards he was appointed a Junior Staff Officer of the *Excellent* gunnery school at Portsmouth, then under the command of Captain (now Lord) Fisher. It is one of Admiral Jellicoe's chief boasts to-day, that he is popularly known in naval circles as 'one of Jack Fisher's men.' The stamp of Fisher upon a navyman is equivalent to the stamp of Kitchener upon a soldier, and most folk know what that means. It is rather remarkable to note how frequently the careers of Fisher and Jellicoe come together in recounting the history of the Navy during the past thirty years; they have so often worked side by side.

Although Lieutenant Jellicoe was fated to gain his next medal in an exploit rather of peace than of war, it was a medal that he greatly appreciated. It was awarded to him in May, 1886, while he was a gunnery lieutenant on H.M.S. *Monarch*. The medal was received from the Board of Trade, and was awarded for a gallant attempt to save a shipwrecked crew near Gibraltar. The story is easily told, but the deed which inspired it was one of those quiet acts of heroism of which men of action are frequently the central figure. A steamer had become stranded upon a sandbank near Gibraltar. The day was very stormy, and heavy seas broke over the unfortunate craft as she lay firmly grounded. The crew of the wrecked vessel were in considerable peril, and, apprehending the position of affairs, young Jellicoe commanded a gig and called for volunteers to attempt the rescue—a hazardous venture indeed. There was no lack of replies, and the gig set out on her venturesome trip. The seas rushed at and rolled over and sported with the frail craft, which quickly capsized. The gallant crew at once found themselves struggling for dear

life in the turmoil of the raging waters. Fortunately each man was provided with a cork jacket, and the whole of the would-be rescuers were washed ashore, little the worse of their battle with the sea. The *Monarch*, it may be added, had gone out for target practice, and the gig which Lieutenant Jellicoe commanded was the only one which had not been left behind.

Lieutenant Jellicoe served also as gunnery lieutenant on H.M.S. *Colossus*, and for some time fulfilled an appointment on the staff of the *Excellent* gunnery establishment. On the 30th June, 1891, he was gazetted as Commander, and found employment as assistant to the Director of Naval Ordnance. Here again he had the benefit of being under Captain Fisher, and his special aptitude for the subject of guns and gunnery proved to be beneficial. From his great chief young Jellicoe learned much that was valuable to him in his subsequent naval career, and he recalls with pleasure this period of his association with His Lordship. Subsequently Lieutenant Jellicoe was appointed to H.M.S. *Sans Pareil*.

In 1891 Jellicoe was acting as First Lieutenant

on H.M.S. *Sans Pareil*, and in June of that year he was promoted to be Commander, in which capacity he was appointed to H.M.S. *Victoria*, the flagship of Vice-Admiral Sir George Tryon, then Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Squadron.

An experience that Sir John will never forget is his participation in the disastrous collision between H.M.S. *Victoria* and H.M.S. *Camperdown*, on the 22nd June, 1893, when the latter vessel rammed the former, causing her to sink during manœuvres, and only a small minority of the personnel of the vessel were saved. Probably Sir John never has had a narrower squeak than the thrilling escape he had on that occasion. He lay in his bunk in the grip of a high fever when the terrible collision occurred, but he managed to reach the bridge in his pyjamas, and arrived at his appointed station just as the ill-starred warship plunged to her final resting-place. With most of the men who were on deck, the Commander was hurled into the sea, and, too weak with fever to do much to save himself, was gallantly rescued from his perilous position by a heroic midshipman. West, this

youthful hero's name, seized hold of the invalid and kept both afloat until they were picked up. Commander Jellicoe has an amusing story to tell as a sequel to his tragic experience on the occasion of the disaster. His Board of Trade silver medal—which, under circumstances already described, had been awarded to him for gallantry in saving life at sea—was, along with other personal effects, lost in the *Victoria*. Later Commander Jellicoe informed the Government Department interested of the fact, and they intimated in reply that another medal could be obtained on payment! The other medal has not yet been purchased.

The tragedy of the *Victoria* appears to have been due to a miscalculation of distance on the part of the Commander-in-Chief. About half-past two o'clock in the afternoon the squadron had formed in two parallel lines, distant one from the other about six cables'-length, each vessel maintaining a distance of two cables'-length from the next. The *Victoria* led the starboard line, that nearest the shore, the *Camperdown* (Rear-Admiral Markham) heading the other. The scene of

the disaster was about seven miles off the town of Tripoli, on the Syrian coast. An order was given by Sir George Tryon to effect a change in the formation, which involved each line of vessels turning inwards. To certain high officers of the fleet it seemed that to attempt such a manœuvre as had been signalled to them was to court certain disaster, but the order was repeated. The adamant rule on the sea is to obey orders strictly, no matter at what cost, and the huge vessels began to move. What was anticipated happened.

In endeavouring to execute the movement the *Camperdown* collided with the *Victoria*, striking her just before the turret starboard. These were the days of the warships with heavy rams, and the ram of the *Camperdown* cut open the side of the *Victoria* as if it had been a can-opener applied to tin. No time was lost in doing all that was humanly possible to save life. But very little time was given for doing anything, the unlucky vessel sinking in a few minutes. Immediately the collision occurred, the head of the *Victoria* was turned towards the land, and orders were given to

bring the crew on deck. The water positively rushed into the huge gap made by the ram, and its inflow became so quick, and the position of the vessel grew so precarious, that the *sauve qui peut* was given, followed by an immediate scramble in the sea by hundreds of sailors, who, despite their perilous plight, behaved with fine heroism and desperate courage.

The vessels had been almost at right angles when the disaster occurred, and as soon as the *Camperdown* got clear her officers and men set themselves to the work of rescue. It was a heart-breaking task, as from the outset the chance of saving many of the brave fellows who suddenly found themselves precipitated into the sea was small. The good ship which had been their home upon many a raging sea sank head foremost, and then assumed a perpendicular attitude, her stern standing for a few moments out of the water. Then she turned right over and quickly disappeared from view into eighty fathoms of water, sinking bottom uppermost. As she sank, a number of explosions occurred, and this served to intensify the struggle for life in the water. Many heroic deeds were performed on the

occasion, and Captain the Hon. Maurice Archibald Bourke, who was alongside Admiral Tryon at the time of the tragedy, paid a high tribute, at the subsequent court-martial, to the pluck and grit of those brave fellows. Every one, according to his account of the scenes that occurred after the collision, went quietly to their places as if there was nothing at all amiss. As has ever been the case with the British Navy, the men below were as cool as the men above, and the engineers and stokers stood stolidly to their posts—grimly, silently waiting the end. Not one jumped from the ship until just as she gave the lurch which ended in her capsizing. Many men, precipitated into the sea as the ship heeled over, were drowned by the mighty disturbance of the water when the explosions occurred.

The Admiral, though attempts were made by a number of his officers and crew to induce him to do so, refused to leave his bridge. The coxswain offered him a lifebuoy, but the Admiral refused to avail himself of it, remarking quietly, 'Save yourself!' The last seen of him was when he was swimming in the water among the struggling crew, still

grasping his telescope. The toll of death included twenty-one officers and 350 men, as well as the Admiral. The complement which the ship had on board totalled 718 souls, including 611 officers, seamen, and boys, and 107 Marines.

CHAPTER II

THE BOXER RISING

ON the 1st January, 1897, Commander Jellicoe was raised to the rank of Captain. In the course of the four years previous, after his hairbreadth escape on H.M.S. *Victoria*, he had served as Commander of H.M.S. *Ramillies*, the new flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron. Following hard upon his promotion, Captain Jellicoe was appointed to the Ordnance Committee, upon which the practical experience he had gained meanwhile, and his innate ability and sound knowledge, made him a useful member, being associated with Lord Fisher in the work of reform he was then engaged upon. In December, 1897, Captain Jellicoe was secured by Vice-Admiral

Sir E. H. Seymour as Flag Captain on board H.M.S. *Centurion*. Sir Edward was then Commander-in-Chief on the China Station, and the *Centurion* was his flagship. It was upon this vessel that Jellicoe was to experience his second active service expedition.

The fighting that took place in the third China War in 1900 was directly the outcome of the machinations of that mysterious body of cut-throat fanatics, popularly known to-day as 'the Boxers.' This extraordinary association has been a plague in the Flowery Land for years. Its tenets are a weird jumble of religious mania and foreign hatred. Cruel to a degree, the Boxers have committed nameless atrocities, and their principal delight appears to be to make chaos out of peace, and to desolate the land. The Boxer rising, according to the Rev. A. Sowerby, who had been twenty years in China, and who was interviewed at the time, began in January, 1900, and was the direct outcome of the action of the ex-Governor of Shantung, one of the strongest anti-foreign men in China. He enlisted the sympathies of the Empress-Dowager, who fostered the movement by

edicts and by preventing its suppression. The Chinese name for this society meant 'righteousness and protection,' and by a Chinese pun the word for righteousness became fist, thence the name of Boxer. The people were also known as the Broad Swords, because at first they were chiefly armed with great broad swords. Subsequently they were well armed. They belonged at first to the lower class population of the north of Shantung and the south and east of Chi-li. The secret of the 1900 rising, according to the same authority, was the chagrin and anger of the Empress-Dowager at her inability to put down the reform party, and at the countenance given to foreigners by the party.

The Consul at Tientsin had, previous to the rising, reported upon 'a sect, known by foreigners as the Boxers, from the gymnastic drill which they cultivate, who had spread from the neighbouring province of Shantung into Chi-li. The drill and spells exercised by the Boxers are supposed to secure invulnerability.' By the spring of 1900 the situation had grown so serious that the squadrons of the different nationalities interested assembled off the

mouth of the Pei-ho River. As the result of a Council of War in May, a mixed force from the squadrons went up to guard the foreign settlement at Tientsin, and seventy-five men of each nationality represented at Peking were sent there to protect the Legations. They arrived at Peking on the 31st of the month. The presence of the foreigners only seemed to inflame the Boxers the more, and things grew so alarming that, on the 9th June, Sir Claude Macdonald, the British Minister, found it necessary to send an urgent telegraphic message to the effect that if an immediate advance were not made on the capital, something serious would happen. The urgency of this appeal was appreciated, and no time was lost in taking action. The outlook by the 11th, indeed, had grown extremely serious, as it was said that all the population, with the exception of the converts to Christianity, were in sympathy with the Boxer movement. The distance between Tientsin and Peking is about ninety miles. Sir Edward Seymour was the senior flag officer of the eight nationalities present in the Far East, and as such presided over their councils and took supreme command

in their operations. As the result of a Council of War, it was decided to send immediately a relieving force of mixed nationalities about 2500 strong, with nineteen guns, the object being to relieve the stress felt by the Legations. Sir Edward himself commanded this Naval Brigade, and Captain Jellicoe was appointed his Chief Staff Officer. It was a grand opportunity for Jellicoe—an opportunity of which he took full advantage.

The morning after the call had been accepted the force left Tientsin in three trains. Sir Edward commanded the first of the trains, which was armed with several guns, and contained 650 British troops, as well as 100 Americans, and smaller contingents of Italians and Austrians. The complement in the second train numbered 600, and was made up of British, Japanese, Russians, and French. In the third train were 500 troops, including 350 Germans, 80 British, and 70 French. That they did not anticipate being long away is proved by the fact that the force took only a week's provisions with them, making arrangements, if need be, for further trains of provisions to be sent on later. But the force

had underrated the tenacity of the enemy, and, as events turned out, the columns were absent sixteen days, and the total casualties amounted to 295 killed and wounded, the British having 27 killed and 97 wounded.

The last train got through on the 13th, and none was despatched from Headquarters till the 16th, when the line was found to have been cut between Lo Fa and Yang Tsun. The train was therefore compelled to return to Lang Fang. Beyond Yant Sung, which General Nieh, with about 3500 troops of the Chinese Government, held, the first compulsory stoppage was made by the expedition, owing to the line having been cut up. The advance after that incident was frequently interrupted by attacks of a more or less determined character from the enemy. Many gruesome sights were seen by the members of the force as they pushed on to Lang Fang. On the way they discovered headless bodies lying alongside the line, and there were other indications of the wilful destructiveness of the Boxers.

What the force had to put up with is graphically depicted in one of Admiral Seymour's

despatches: 'On 13th June two attacks of an advance Boxer guard were repulsed with considerable loss to the Boxers, none to the British. On the 14th the Boxers attacked the train at Lang Fang with great determination, and were repulsed, having 100 killed. Our loss was five Italians. The same evening the enemy attacked the British guard which were protecting the railway station. The enemy had 100 killed. Our loss was two seamen. Opposition has been experienced all the way. From nearly every village the defeated rebels retired to the next village, and retarded our advance by occupying well-selected positions from which they had to be forced, even at the point of the bayonet.' Lang Fang is half-way between Tientsin and Peking.

Six days of continual worry from the Chinese troops were spent at Lang Fang. A train from Tientsin proceeded towards Lo Fa on the 17th June, with working parties to repair the damage to the line. This was found to be considerable. On the following day the enemy advanced with fanatical courage to within twenty yards of the locomotive in face of a tremendous rifle and maxim fire. They

were, however, repulsed. A party of fifty Bluejackets sent in the direction of An Sing was attacked by a large force of Boxers, who made desperate attempts to rush them, but were repulsed. The same afternoon the enemy attempted to capture Lo Fang station, bringing into action four small iron guns, firing pieces of old iron. The menacing force was checked, and had to leave two guns behind.

The communications of the Allied Force with Tientsin were now discovered to be cut, and great damage had been done to the railway, both in front and to the rear. Despite the trying nature of the climate, the British, American, and German troops worked hard, and succeeded in repairing the line in nine days. On the 18th a Council of War was called, and as the result of the decision arrived at, an attempt was made to get back to Tientsin. About half-past seven o'clock on the morning of the 21st June, the march was resumed. About an hour later a body of over 150 cavalry was seen in the distance on the left flank of the advanced guard. At first it was hoped they might be a Cossack relief expedition, but

instead they proved to be Chinese. These having been given a dose of shrapnel, the enemy attacked the force with some determination. The advance of the party on the 21st June was not more than six miles, owing to the stubborn resistance of the enemy at Peitsang.

‘Fighting was carried on continuously throughout a succession of villages, and in the town of Peitsang, which is the chief place between Tientsin and Yangtsun,’ reports Admiral Seymour’s despatch, ‘and at 6 p.m., the enemy being then in a very strong position, from which we were unable to dislodge them during the evening, a halt was made and further movements considered.’

After supper and a few hours’ rest, the forces entered upon a night march in their endeavour to get through. The bridge over the Pei-ho had been destroyed, and this fact rendered imperative the abandonment of the railway and the continuance of the march by the river. It was, therefore, decided to abandon the trains, obtain boats for the transport of the wounded, and move down the river towards Tientsin. The enemy, contesting the

ground with great stubbornness, had to be forcibly driven out of every available place of shelter, to which they clung with the greatest tenacity.

Five miles above Tientsin a specially strong stand was made by the Chinese. A terrific rifle and field gun fire was poured into the ranks of the Expeditionary Force, but the Marines, with great dash and daring, managed at last to get across the river, being splendidly supported by the Germans, who took six guns, which they used to capture the trenches.

In wild disorder the Boxer raiders fled, leaving behind them many Krupp guns, Maxims, and other modern ordnance, as well as a large amount of ammunition for large guns and small arms. Scarcely a moment of peace did the determined Boxers afford the sorely tried expedition; but the Allies were tireless in their energy, and had the satisfaction of winning through in the end.

Having captured Hsi-Ku Arsenal, and repelled the enemy by the help of the guns and ammunition discovered there, Sir Edward was enabled once more to reopen the road to Tientsin. On learning the position of affairs,

Lieutenant-Colonel Slivinsky, with over 1500 troops, at once left Tientsin. On the 25th June the much harassed troops were relieved by the arrival of that officer's column, which formed a welcome relief to a protracted period of great anxiety.

The relief of the expedition was not accomplished without considerable hazard. Fortunately the arrival of reinforcements at Tientsin allowed the force there to send him his much needed assistance.

Seymour's gallant force returned to Tientsin on the 26th, and reported having been absolutely cut off from all communication from the 13th till the 24th, when a Chinese servant was at last induced to take a message into Tientsin. At Peking, there being no news regarding Seymour or his little band of troops, a vague uneasiness began to manifest itself, and when at last it was learned that they had been cut off, exaggerated stories of horrible atrocities began to be bruited abroad.

In the meantime a letter was sent to Seymour stating that Peking was guarded by 10,000 troops, who were assuming a most menacing attitude. The Government there

was going to pieces, and the people, as a whole, were none too friendly. Besides, food and ammunition were beginning to run alarmingly short, and the plight of the Legations was none too enviable. Meantime, determined fighting was kept up on the part of the Boxers, but at last, in August, a force of 20,100 troops, under command of Lieutenant-General Sir Alfred Gaselee, got through to the capital and afforded much needed relief to the Legations.

As the result of the engagement at Pietsang, Captain Jellicoe was officially reported as wounded seriously. He had behaved throughout with outstanding gallantry, and it almost seemed as if he had seen his last fight. But his pluck and determination once more told, and he recovered to appreciate the fact that in his official despatch describing the progress of events, Sir Edward Seymour specifically referred to Captain Jellicoe as one 'who was, as always, of most valuable help, both by his judgment and action, till disabled by a serious wound at the battle of Pietsang on 21st June.'

In recognition of his services on that occasion, Captain Jellicoe was made a Commander

of the Order of the Bath the following November. His valuable and repeated assistance was also mentioned by the United States Commander. And as a direct outcome of the same adventure the gallant officer received his only German decoration. In 1902 the German Emperor conferred upon him the Prussian Order of the Red Eagle of the Second Class with Crossed Swords.

CHAPTER III

DREADNOUGHT DAYS

RETURNING from China at the end of 1901, Captain Jellicoe was, in November of that year, appointed to superintend the building by contract of ships of war. In the following February he became Naval Assistant to the Controller of the Navy, an office then worthily occupied by that fine naval expert, Sir William May. He vacated the post in August, 1903, upon being appointed to command H.M.S. *Drake* while that warship was attached to the Cruiser Squadron. He succeeded Rear-Admiral Bridgeman in this command.

When Lord Fisher (then Sir John) required a Director of Naval Ordnance it was Jellicoe whom he chose for the important post. And so, in February, 1905, Captain Jellicoe returned to the Admiralty to take up the appointment. The development of gunnery during this period was almost sensational in its rapidity, and Jellicoe, as an expert upon ordnance, kept a keen eye upon the many important points that came before him. He took up the office in succession to Rear-Admiral Barry. 'The improvement of good shooting in the Navy during 1905 was,' writes an expert, 'due to Jellicoe, without whose help the good work fostered by Sir Percy Scott would have been heavily handicapped.' And it is a fact. As Director of Naval Ordnance he proved himself to be highly efficient, the mounting and fitting of guns and of gunnery appliances being subjects upon which he bestowed much care. It was while Captain Jellicoe held the appointment that the first all-big-gun ship, H.M.S. *Dreadnought*, was evolved. In its fulfilment he had given every support to his superior officers who devoted so much attention to the

improvement of the gunnery equipment of the fleet, and as a member of the *Dreadnought* Design Committee his work was far from being of a purely passive nature. Captain Jellicoe's share in the design of the *Dreadnought* was recognised by the late King Edward, who personally conferred a Knight Commandership of the Victorian Order upon him on the occasion of the launch of the leviathan at Portsmouth in February, 1906.

Speaking in London in February, 1902, Lord Charles Beresford said: 'We have too many sorts of guns in our ships. I was talking the matter over with Sir John Fisher and he used the best expression I have heard on the point. "What we want," he said, "on our ships is the biggest-smallest gun and the smallest-biggest gun." I entirely agree with him.' Designed by Sir Philip Watts, K.C.B., Director of Naval Construction, with whom was closely identified Admiral Oram, C.B., Deputy Engineer-in-Chief of the Admiralty, the total cost of the *Dreadnought* complete with guns was £1,797,497. The exact details of the *Dreadnought's* construction were kept a strict secret, and when at last

they were revealed they created considerable surprise among the Powers. With a superior speed of 21·85 knots, she was found to carry ten 12-inch guns as her main battery, five guns to combat attack by torpedo boat, and twenty-four 3-inch 12-pounder quick-firers, in addition to five under-water torpedo tubes.

‘While it is recognised,’ a Parliamentary Paper, issued at the time, explained, ‘that broadside fire is held to be the most important in a battleship, all-round fire is also considered of great importance, since it lies in the power of an enemy to force an opponent who is anxious to engage to fight an end-on action. In the arrangement of armament adopted, six of the guns are mounted in pairs on the centre line of the ship. The remaining four guns are mounted in pairs on the broadside. These eight 12-inch guns—80 per cent. of the main armament—can be fired on either broadside, and four, or possibly six, 12-inch guns—or 60 per cent. of the main armament—can be fired simultaneously ahead or astern.’ The cost of the *Dreadnought* type of battleship, which at once became in great demand by the principal Powers, was well indicated by

Mr McKenna, who, speaking as First Lord of the Admiralty, said, when the Navy Estimates were being discussed in the House of Commons in 1911 : 'The *Dreadnoughts*, the eight battleships now in commission, cost £1,710,000 apiece. The cost of those eight battleships is precisely the same to build as the cost of nine *King Edwards*. But the upkeep of the eight *Dreadnoughts* costs £50,000 less a year than the upkeep of the nine *King Edwards*.'

The *Dreadnought* Committee inaugurated a new era in the matter of warships, and it is only in the nature of things that what may be called its pioneer work in this respect should have led to still greater surprises in the matter of naval development. The 12-inch gun was destined to give way to the 13·5-inch gun firing a 1250 lb. shell, or a projectile about 400 lb. heavier than its predecessor. And there are what have been called hyper-super-*Dreadnoughts* carrying 15-inch guns, the projectile of which weighs 1950 lb. The speed of some of those remarkable ships is said to reach the very high figure of 25 knots. The logical outcome of the *Dreadnought* battleship was the *Dreadnought* cruiser, which,

as an expert said four years ago, 'could steam round a fleet of pre-*Dreadnought* ships and fire when it suited them, keeping beyond the range which would enable the old battleship guns to penetrate the armour of the modern cruiser.' Orders were provisionally placed in 1912 with a Clyde firm for the construction of the battle cruiser *Tiger*, which was intended to be the largest, fastest, best protected, and most powerfully armed ship of the type in the world. The armament of the *Tiger* created much comment, but nothing definite regarding it was allowed by the Admiralty to transpire, except that the guns were reported to be an improvement upon the 13·5 guns which, according to Mr Churchill, had not their equal in any other Navy at that time. Her anti-torpedo boat guns were also a great advance on those formerly in use, and she was designed to carry in addition anti-aircraft guns of a superior pattern. In October, 1914, she slipped off from the river of her birth, a noteworthy addition to Admiral Jellicoe's admirable fleet, and was commissioned immediately afterwards.

During his tenancy of the post of Director

of Naval Ordnance, which he relinquished in August, 1907, Admiral Jellicoe acted for a year, from the 8th March, 1906, as Naval Aide-de-Camp to the King. On 8th February following he attained to flag rank, and in August he was appointed to the Atlantic Fleet as Rear-Admiral, an appointment he held for one year.

On the occasion of the great review of the Home Fleet in the Solent by King Edward VII., on the 3rd August, 1907, he was made a Knight Commander of the Victorian Order, at the reception on the Royal yacht, *Victoria and Albert*, which concluded the day's proceedings. It was a magnificent spectacle, this Review of the Home Fleet. Enthusiastic chroniclers of the event have worthily described the fleet as 'a huge Armada called together not merely for show, but rather by way of war training.' To the populace the appealing feature was the splendid picture of Britain's naval strength presented by the great ships as they lay in the brilliant sunshine awaiting the coming of the King. At last he arrived, and his advent was made the signal for the booming of big guns—the

Dreadnought began it—and the ringing cheers of thousands of his loyal subjects. It was a magnificent welcome. The King and the Prince of Wales, who were in Admiral's uniform, were accompanied by the Queen and other Royal ladies. The day was ideal, and the Solent had put on its most picturesque aspect. Nearly 200 warships took part in the Review, and they were arranged in eleven lines as the King made his inspection of the ships. All types were represented — battleships, armoured cruisers (first, second, and third class), torpedo gunboats, destroyers, and submarines.

In October, 1908, Admiral Jellicoe was appointed a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty and Controller of the Navy, and for two years did good service in that important position. On the 20th December, 1910, he was appointed Vice-Admiral Commanding the Atlantic Fleet, holding temporary acting rank until his promotion to Vice-Admiral on 18th September, 1911. On the 19th June previous, Admiral Jellicoe's name appeared in the Coronation Honours List of King George V. The honour bestowed upon him was a Knight Commandership of the Order

of the Bath. On the 18th September he became a Vice-Admiral. His relinquishment of the command of the Atlantic Fleet was followed by his appointment to the command of the Second Squadron of the Home Fleet.

Mention of the Home Fleet recalls the fact that that part of the naval organisation is of comparatively recent date. It really is one of the products of the work of Admirals Sir William Dowell, Sir R. Vesey Hamilton, and Sir Frederick Richards, who, reporting upon the condition and administration of the fleet in the Victorian era, stated: 'It would, in our opinion, be far more in consonance with the requirements of the nation, by the provision of an adequate fleet to render invasion an impossibility, than to enter into costly arrangements to meet an enemy on our shores (instead of destroying his Armadas off our shores), for under the conditions in which it would be possible for a great Power to successfully invade Britain, nothing could avail her, as the command of the sea once being lost, it would not require the landing of a single man upon her shores to bring her to an ignominious capitulation, for by her Navy

she must stand or fall.' At this time the chief centre of the naval defence of the Empire was the Mediterranean, but the words quoted above, coupled with the rivalry which later sprang up on the Continent in regard to naval matters, resulted in the changing of the fleet headquarters to northern waters. To Lord Selborne is due much of the credit for the change. His Christmas box to the Navy in 1904 was the publication of his Memorandum, as the result of which the Home Fleet was organised. The Home Fleet is really in three parts. The First Fleet, generally speaking, comprises the pick of the warships, which are constantly, even in time of peace, kept in a state of absolute readiness for eventualities. The other Fleets, in peace time, are not exactly in full commission. In the hands of the Home Fleet lie the safety and security of the country—a necessity that is in excellent hands with a man like Admiral Jellicoe.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEA LORDS

HAVING succeeded Sir H. B. Jackson at the Admiralty, Sir John Jellicoe became Third Sea Lord. As a member of the Royal Commission on the Supply and Storage of Liquid Fuel in Peace and War, appointed in 1912, he did admirable work, under the chairmanship of Lord Fisher. On the 6th December, 1912, it was announced that Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman had resigned the post of First Sea Lord through ill-health, and his place as First Sea Lord was taken by Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg, the vacancy left by the latter in the post of Second Sea Lord being filled by the appointment of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, from the command of the Second Battle Squadron. Prince Louis worthily upheld his position as First Sea Lord till he resigned on the 28th October, 1914, being succeeded by Lord Fisher, who had already filled the office in 1904-10.

While the First Lord of the Admiralty is

charged with the general direction of all business, the First Sea Lord has to superintend a multitude of duties, including, according to an authority, preparation for war, advice upon all large questions of naval policy and maritime warfare, the fighting and seagoing efficiency of the Fleet, its organisation and mobilisation (including complements of ships as affecting total numbers), the system of gunnery and torpedo exercises of the Fleet, the tactical employment of aircraft, all military questions connected with these, the distribution and movements of all ships in commission and in reserve, and the superintendence of the War Staff and the Hydrographic Department. The work of the Second Sea Lord is of supreme importance in its bearing to the question of keeping the fleet in good trim in case of eventualities. The special care of the appointment has been thus succinctly summed up, 'Manning and training of the fleet; details of complements of ships and establishments; barracks, training, and educational establishments, with their complements, also all mobilisation regulations for the personnel; service and appointments of officers of all branches

(except as reserved to First Lord); Royal Marines, Coastguard and Reserve Forces, hospitals, discipline (except questions of extra importance and questions of total fleet numbers); signals.' It is work that demands constant personal surveillance and an active, ready brain. In its fulfilment, Admiral Jellicoe once more displayed that outstanding administrative ability which had previously marked the performance of all his land duties.

Mr Winston Churchill did much to strengthen and co-ordinate the work of what is sometimes called the moving power of the Navy, and the establishment as it now stands cannot be better summed up than in the words of the Official Memorandum, which, incidentally, gives a good insight into the work that Admiral Jellicoe has had to superintend in his administrative capacity :—

'In establishing a War Staff for the Navy it is necessary to observe the broad differences of character and circumstances which distinguish naval from military problems. War on land varies in every country, according to numberless local conditions, and each new theatre, like each separate battlefield, requires

a special study. A whole series of intricate arrangements must be thought out and got ready for each particular case; and these are expanded and refined continuously with every increase in the size of the armies, and by every step towards the perfection of military science.

‘The means by which superior forces can be brought to decisive points in good condition and at the right time are no whit less vital, and involve far more elaborate processes, than the strategic choice of those points, or the actual conduct of the fighting. The sea, on the other hand, is all one, and though ever changing, always the same. Every ship is self-contained and self-propelled. The problems of transport and supply, the infinite peculiarities of topography which are the increasing study of the general staffs of Europe, do not affect the Naval Service, except in an occasional and limited degree.

‘The main part of the British Fleet, in sufficient strength to seek a general battle, is always ready to proceed to sea without any mobilisation of reserves, as soon as steam is raised. Ships, or fleets of ships, are

capable of free and continuous movement for many days and nights together, and travel at least as far in an hour as an army can march in a day. Every vessel is in instant communication with its fleet and with the Admiralty, and all can be directed from the ports where they are stationed, or any sea points chosen for massing, by a short and simple order. Unit efficiency—that is to say, the individual fighting power of each vessel—is in the sea service for considerable periods entirely independent of all external arrangements, and unit efficiency at sea, far more even than on land, is the prime and final factor without which the combinations of strategy and tactics are only the preliminaries of defeat, but with which even faulty dispositions can be swiftly and decisively retrieved. For these and other similar reasons a Naval War Staff does not require to be designed on the same scale or in the same form as the General Staff of the Army. Naval War is at once more simple and more intense than war on land. The executive action and control of fleet and squadron commanders is direct and personal in a far stronger degree than that of

generals in the field, especially under modern conditions.

‘The art of handling a great fleet on important occasions with deft and sure judgment is the supreme gift of the Admiral, and practical seamanship must never be displaced from its position as the first qualification of every sailor. The formation of a War Staff does not mean the setting up of a new standard of professional merit or the opening of a road of advancement to a different class of officers. The War Staff is to be the means of preparing and training those officers who arrive, or are likely to arrive, by the excellence of their sea service, at stations of high responsibility, for dealing with the more extended problems which await them there. It is to be the means of sifting, developing, and applying the results of history and experience, and of preserving them as a general stock of reasoned opinion available as an aid and as a guide for all who are called upon to determine, in peace or war, the naval policy of the country. It is to be a brain far more comprehensive than that of any single man, however gifted, and tireless and unceasing in its action,

applied continuously to the scientific and speculative study of naval strategy and preparation. It is to be an instrument capable of formulating any decision which has been taken, or may be taken, by the executive, in terms of precise and exhaustive detail.

‘It should not be supposed that these functions find no place in the Admiralty organisation at the present time. On the contrary, during the course of years, all, or nearly all, the elements of a War Staff at the Admiralty have been successively evolved in the practical working of everyday affairs, and have been developing since the organisation of the Foreign Intelligence Branch in 1883. The time has now come to combine these elements into an harmonious and effective organisation, to invest that new body with significance and influence which it has not hitherto possessed, and to place it in its proper relation to existing power. The government of the Navy has by long usage been exercised by the Admiralty representing the office of Lord High Admiral in combination. There is no need to alter the constitution which has

been respected through centuries of naval supremacy by all ranks in the fleets.

‘The War Staff will, like all other persons in the Admiralty or the Navy, be under general authority of the Board of Admiralty. It will not interpose any barrier between the Board and the Navy. All orders which emanate from the Board will continue to be transmitted in the regular manner by the Secretary to those whom they concern.

‘Each of the Sea Lords of the Board of Admiralty has a special sphere of superintendence assigned to him by the First Lord in pursuance of the Order in Council. All these heads of large departments will have occasion, in the discharge of their respective duties, to recur to the War Staff or its various branches for general information or for working out special inquiries. Since, however, under the distribution of Admiralty business or the Board, the First Sea Lord occupies for certain purposes, especially the daily distribution of the Fleet, on which the safety of the country depends, the position of a Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, with the First Lord immediately over him as the delegate

of the Crown in exercising supreme executive power, it follows that the War Staff must work at all time directly under the First Sea Lord. His position is different in important respects from those of the senior member of the Army Council as constituted.

‘The First Sea Lord is an executive officer in active control of daily Fleet movements, who requires, like a general in the field, to have at his disposal a Chief-of-the-Staff, but who is not the Chief-of-the-Staff himself. A proper staff, whether naval or military, should comprise three main branches—namely, a branch to acquire the information on which action may be taken; a branch to deliberate on the facts so obtained in relation to the policy of the State, and to report thereupon; and thirdly, a branch to enable the final decision of superior authority to be put into actual effect.’

CHAPTER V

BRITAIN INVADED—TWO KEELS TO ONE

FROM the standpoint of the general public, naval manœuvres as a whole are regarded as of comparatively little moment. The man in the street may display a languid interest in the knowledge that the 'rival' fleets are voyaging somewhere in the vast expanse of the North Sea in the course of their annual training, but beyond that his concern in the matter appears to cease. It is, of course, a totally wrong perspective on the part of the general public, this neglect of the keeping fit for active operations of the great fleet of which the country has always been so justly proud.

The naval manœuvres of 1913 are of particular significance. The trend of subsequent events made them the last manœuvres of the kind before the British Fleet found itself called upon to engage in actual warfare, and the man who was destined to command the Grand Fleet in the European War was the

man who proved to be the hero of the manœuvres. His success was as sensational as it was striking, and it may be taken for granted that, as its result, the crowd of British naval experts who witnessed it learned one or two valuable things, which have proved of the greatest service to them in the present circumstances.

The general idea of the manœuvres was understood to be that a Red Fleet would endeavour to land an Expeditionary Force on the East Coast, and a Blue Fleet would endeavour to prevent its doing so.

The Red Fleet was commanded by Vice-Admiral Jellicoe, who had been taken from his duties at the Admiralty—where he retained his seat—for the purpose, and who flew his flag on H.M.S. *Thunderer*. The Red Fleet possessed nine ships of the *Dreadnought* type, six of them having 13·5 guns. The Red Fleet's battleships were the *Agamemnon*, the *Lord Nelson*, the *Orion*, the *Monarch*, the *Thunderer*, the *Conqueror*, the *King George V.*, the *Centurion*, the *Dreadnought*, the *Cornwallis*, the *Russell*, the *Albemarle*, the *Duncan*, the *Exmouth*, the *Glory*, and the *Vengeance*.

Its battle cruisers were the *Indomitable* and the *Invincible*. The Red Fleet had fewer ordinary armoured cruisers than the Blue Fleet, but what they had were the best in the Royal Navy. The First Cruiser Squadron, which was with them, was the Mediterranean Squadron, its units being the *Defence*, the *Black Prince*, the *Duke of Edinburgh*, and the *Warrior*. In addition there were the training cruisers *Cornwall* and *Cumberland*. Of light cruisers the Red Fleet had the *Bristol*, the *Liverpool*, the *Falmouth*, the *Weymouth*, and the *Dartmouth*, along with thirty-five modern ocean-going destroyers in two flotillas, and one flotilla of 30-knot vessels. The submarines consisted of seven C's, seven D's, and four E's. In the Red Fleet's care were four Indian troopships. The class of these vessels may be judged by the fact that two of the four were the British India liners *Rewa* and *Rohilla*, and one was the P. & O. liner *Dongola*. The *Soudan* was the only one of the five troopships which was not employed in these exercises. Three battalions of infantry and a battalion of marines were embarked to supplement the Red Fleet's operations.

Pitted against him to repel his attempted 'invasion' of the British coast, Admiral Jellicoe's 'enemy,' Sir George A. Callaghan, flew his flag, as Admiral of the Blue Fleet, on the *Neptune*. The defending force had twelve ships of the *Dreadnought* type, only two of which had 13·5 guns. The Blue Fleet's battle-ships were the *Neptune*, the *Bellerophon*, the *Temeraire*, the *Superb*, the *St Vincent*, the *Collingwood*, the *Vanguard*, the *Colossus*, the *Hercules*, the *Africa*, the *Britannia*, the *Commonwealth*, the *Dominion*, the *Hibernia*, the *Hindustan*, the *King Edward VII.*, the *Zealandia*, the *Bulwark*, the *Formidable*, the *Implacable*, the *Irresistible*, the *London*, the *Prince of Wales*, the *Queen*, and the *Venerable*.

Its battle cruisers were the *Lion*, the *Princess Royal*, and the *Indefatigable*. The two first-named were reckoned the two speediest vessels, and both carried the big guns. The ordinary armoured cruisers comprised the *Shannon*, the *Achilles*, the *Cochrane*, the *Natal*, nine ships of the two *County* classes, three of the *Drake* class, four of the *Cressy* class, four of the *Diadem* class, and eight of the *Edgar* class. Of light cruisers there were

the *Chatham*, the *Dublin*, the *Southampton*, the *Amphion*, the *Active*, and the six ex-scouts. The seven mine-layers were naturally with the Blue Fleet. So were the River destroyers, the torpedo boats, and the 30-knot destroyers. Of sea-going destroyers the Blue Fleet had the First and the Fourth Flotillas. The *Tribal* class were in the Fourth. The First Flotilla was composed principally of vessels built in 1911. The Blue Submarine Fleet consisted of three B's and twenty-one C's.

The 347 ships which took part in the manœuvres entered upon their fleet work, after a week's preliminary training, on the 22nd June. The Admiralty announced that the duration of the manœuvres would depend upon the course of events. The territory allotted to the Blue Fleet was the British Isles, with the exception of the strip of coast-line extending from Dover to Yarmouth. The Red Fleet occupied that strip, measuring about 250 miles and including Dover, Chatham, Sheerness, and Harwich bases as well as the mouth of the Thames. Accompanying Mr Winston Churchill, who, as the First Lord of the Admiralty, took the opportunity to make

a tour of inspection of a number of bases round the coast, were Colonel Seely, Secretary of State for War; Admiral Sir Reginald Custance, K.C.B.; Vice-Admiral Sir R. S. Lowry, senior naval officer on the coast of Scotland; General Sir John French, of the General Imperial Staff; Admiral Sir H. B. Jackson, K.C.B.; Major Hankey, of the Imperial Defence Committee; Major Moubray, King's Harbour Master, Rosyth; Mr J. E. Masterton Smith, private secretary to Mr Churchill; and Mr John Churchill, brother of the First Lord. The presence of these gentlemen was sufficient indication of the importance set upon the manœuvres. On the 23rd June, Vice-Admiral Jellicoe's fleet left the Nore in the morning for sea to make 'war.' The result proved startling, and gave rise to heated controversy in political and national circles.

Admiral Jellicoe sprang upon the country one of those little surprises for which his genius for doing just the right thing at the right moment is so noted. The next morning the announcement was made public that a successful raid had been made upon the

Humber by the 'enemy,' and that the important shipping centres of Grimsby and Immingham had been (theoretically) reduced to ruins ! 'This,' dramatically remarked a per-
fervid scribe at the time, 'within three days of the opening of the Naval Manœuvres, is the answer to those critics who maintain that invasion of these shores is impossible.' Certainly, as one critic pointed out, the movement of the Red Fleet was a great strategic success, for, drawing the defending fleet away from the estuary entrance, they had a clear passage to secure possession of the district. The defending vessels were in strong force in the river during the night, but during the early hours a raid on the Yorkshire coast was anticipated from the movements of the enemy's ships in the distance, and while the defenders prepared to frustrate this landing, the transports and their escorts calmly took possession of Grimsby and Immingham, railway bridges and lines being blown up. The 'invaders' made one mistake. When two transports with escorts proceeded to Immingham, the pier berths being seized, the troops walked ashore, while the escorts returned to

Grimsby. No sooner had the warships left the transports than half a dozen destroyers of the Blue Fleet came from their obscured position beyond a bend of the river and sank them with torpedoes. This disaster being made known, an attacking cruiser engaged the destroyers, but the latter were able to escape beyond range, where the heavier ships could not follow. During the afternoon Vice-Admiral Jellicoe got all his troops back to their ships from Grimsby, an accomplishment which was supposed to complete the manœuvre in his favour.

The gods were particularly kind to the Red Fleet. Following the successful raid on Grimsby, a large body of the defending fleet's ships returned to the Humber, when, commencing at midnight, the Blue Fleet were set the task of leaving their base to join the main fleet within twenty-four hours to complete the manœuvres. Throughout the 25th the Blue Fleet ineffectually attempted to draw the 'enemy,' the cruisers *Leander*, *Bristol*, *Falmouth*, *Sappho*, and *Hebe* being put out of action. However, the defenders managed to sink the battleship *Duncan*, which was

'torpedoed' by two submarines, the vessels gaining cover of a steam trawler. By early evening over a dozen vessels anchored off Grimsby 'sunk.'

Contemporaneously with these happenings it was announced that the Admiralty had let contracts for the construction of a powerful fort at Stallingborough, to guard the new oil fuel depot near Immingham.

On the 26th a raid was made on Sunderland. Having captured Grimsby, Vice-Admiral Jellicoe's fleet proceeded towards Holland, and steaming throughout the night without lights, they were successful in eluding the Blue Fleet at the Dogger Bank, and reached the mouth of the Wear early in the morning. While Sunderland was in process of occupation, a sensational incident occurred amongst the warships. A Blue Fleet submarine suddenly arose from the water and, discharging a blank shot, 'disabled' the cruiser *Exmouth*. The submarine disappeared as mysteriously as it rose. The troops, having remained in the town about four hours, began to re-embark with only one destroyer keeping guard. The opportunity was an excellent one for the

Blue Fleet, and it was promptly seized. Fourteen of their warships appeared and surrounded the port in a line, making a complete capture of the attacking fleet before it had finished its operations. A further attempt to invade Blyth the following day was unsuccessful, resulting in a North Sea fight and the utter 'defeat' of the 'enemy.' So ended the great manœuvres, the official result remaining a secret. Sir John Jellicoe's fleet left the Nore on the 30th to take part in the tactical exercises phase of the manœuvres, which, secretly carried out, was understood to include some interesting experiments with aircraft.

An amusing incident occurred in the course of the manœuvres. It transpired that, while watching the movements of the fleet, Mr Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, Colonel Seely, Secretary for War, and General French landed at Inchkeith from the Admiralty yacht *Enchantress*. They proceeded to the fort, but were stopped by a sentry. It is stated that they had no pass such as is required, and getting past the sentry were stopped by a sergeant whom, however,

they succeeded in satisfying regarding their bona fides.

‘The only way to prevent the Continental Powers from bridling you is for Great Britain to proceed in her proper sphere as insular Power possessing the command of the sea,’ remarked the great Napoleon. It looked as if the Navy was to be neglected altogether for some time prior to the late eighties. These were, comparatively speaking, piping times of peace, so far at least as the Navy was concerned, and there arose a disquieting tendency among politicians to cut and carve when it came to the question of the maintenance of the fleet. Reference has already been made to the Committee of the Three Admirals, out of whose report may be said to have arisen the Home Fleet establishment. That report also contained the following historic declaration, which possesses added significance to-day when Britain and Germany are at war: ‘If Britain could consistently with honour control the question of peace or war, there would be no need for haste in bringing up her naval force to the standard required for ensuring, under Providence, a

successful issue to a struggle for the freedom of the seas; but as there seems nothing to support the belief that she would have any option in the matter when it suited another great Power to challenge her maritime position, we are decidedly of opinion that no time should be lost in placing her Navy beyond comparison with that of any two Powers. Without particularising her possible antagonist there can be no doubt that were Britain involved in a maritime war, and she were to resume her natural rights as a belligerent (which appear to have been voluntarily laid aside by the Declaration of Peace in 1866), complications with neutral States would inevitably ensue, and her whole commercial position, and the immense carrying trade by which it is sustained, would be jeopardised at the outset were war to be forced upon her at a time when her fleet was weak. No other nation has such interest in the maintenance of an undoubted superiority at sea as has Britain, whose seaboard is her frontier. Britain ranks among the great Powers of the world by virtue of the naval position she has acquired in the past, and which has never been

seriously challenged since the close of the last great war.' In the meanwhile Germany, with her growing spirit of pan-militarism, was keeping a greedy eye upon the little insular Power across the North Sea. There was no real act of hostility towards Great Britain until the sending of the historic congratulatory telegram from the German Emperor to President Paul Kruger in January, 1895, upon the occasion of the Jameson raid in South Africa. The incident created considerable comment in Great Britain. Thenceforth, slowly but surely, Germany nurtured her Navy until the Naval Act of 1900 was found to result in her fleet being nearly doubled. 'Germany,' it was stated in the Official Memorandum, 'must have a fleet of such strength that even for the mightiest Naval Power a war with her would involve such risks as to jeopardise its own supremacy.' The Act was amended in 1906, and again in 1908, and the Continental Power's remarkable increase in the number of her fighting ships attracted the attention of the political leaders of Britain. 'Germany,' Sir Edward Grey said, in a notable warning in 1909, 'is creating a fleet larger than has ever

existed before.' This Teutonic endeavour to amass a great fleet culminated in the passing of the German Navy Law Amendment Act, which was approved by the Reichstag on the 21st May, 1912. 'The Germans,' remarked the First Lord of the Admiralty, in laying upon the table of the House of Commons the Naval Estimates for 1912-13, 'are a people of robust mind, whose strong and masculine sense and high courage do not recoil from and is not offended by plain and blunt statements of fact, if expressed with courtesy and sincerity.' In August, 1913, some criticism was levelled against the naval position in the House of Lords by Lord Selborne, and, replying for the Government, Lord Ashby St Ledgers claimed that in the pre-*Dreadnought* class our superiority over Germany was as twenty to seventeen, and in the super-*Dreadnought* class as seven to none. He was given to understand that in the ships now being laid down, which would be delivered in two years' time (*i.e.* in 1915), our superiority in the newest and most formidable ships would be as ten to two. But the European War intervened and upset the calculations of all the experts.

CHAPTER VI

EUROPEAN WAR, 1914

ESPECIALLY in the case of a sea-girt land like Great Britain, naval victory may be obtained just as truly by the silent method of keeping her main trade routes free from marauders as by the deafening roar of mighty guns. 'So far as the Navy is concerned,' said Mr Winston Churchill at Liverpool in September, 1914, 'we cannot fight while the enemy remains in port. It takes two to make a quarrel. But we are enjoying at the present moment, without having fought a battle, all those advantages of the command of the sea which would follow if we had a battle, and the German Navy were destroyed. Our food and trade are arriving freely; the enemy's commerce has been swept from the seas. We are drawing men by the twenty, thirty, and hundred thousand from all parts of the British Empire. Although we hope that a decision at sea will be a feature of this war, and though our men's tireless though wearying vigil

continues week after week and month after month; although we hope they will have a chance of settling the question with the German Fleet, yet if they don't come out and fight in time of war, they will be dug out like rats in a hole.'

When it became apparent that Britain was on the brink of being dragged into the European War, steps were at once taken to prepare, and how quickly the men of the Navy responded may be judged by the official Admiralty notice, dated the 3rd August: 'The mobilisation of the British Navy was completed in all respects at 4 a.m. this morning. This is due to the measures taken, and to the voluntary response of the Reserve men in advance of the Royal Proclamation which has now been issued. The entire Navy is now on a war footing.' The following day it was officially announced that 'With the approval of His Majesty the King, Admiral Sir John R. Jellicoe, K.C.B., K.C.V.O., has assumed supreme command of the Home Fleets with the acting rank of Admiral, and Rear-Admiral Charles E. Madden, C.V.O., has been appointed to be his Chief of the

Staff. Both appointments date from yesterday.' It was originally intended that Sir John should succeed Sir George Callaghan at the end of the year, but on account of the seriousness of the international situation, the appointment was accelerated. Admiral Jellicoe's flagship is H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, and, in view of his experience in the *Victoria* disaster, it is surely a most remarkable coincidence that a previous *Iron Duke* accidentally rammed H.M.S. *Vanguard* off the Irish coast in September, 1875.

Upon the official announcement of Admiral Jellicoe's appointment to command the fleet destined to protect the most important strategic sheet of water in the war, His Majesty King George addressed the following message to him: 'At this grave moment in our national history I send to you, and through you to the officers and men of the fleets of which you have assumed command, the assurance of my confidence that under your direction they will revive and renew the old glories of the Royal Navy, and prove once again the sure shield of Britain and of her Empire in the hour of trial.—GEORGE R.I.'

This message was communicated to the senior naval officer on all stations outside of home waters. Admiral Jellicoe's reply to the gracious message was in the following terms : 'On behalf of the officers and men of the Home Fleets I beg to tender our loyal and dutiful thanks to Your Majesty for the gracious message, which will inspire all with determination to uphold the glorious traditions of the past.—COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, Home Fleet.'

'I consider that I have command of the sea when I am able to tell my Government that they can move an expedition to any point without fear of interference from an enemy's fleet,' was the opinion of that eminent authority, Sir Geoffrey Hornby. That Admiral Jellicoe had command of the sea is proved by the splendid manner in which the many troopships that conveyed the Expeditionary Force over to the Continent were able to complete their task quite by the 16th August.

As befitted a maritime nation, at the outset when war was declared, every effort was made, and with conspicuous success, to facilitate trade in all directions. Every day saw the British control of the trade routes,

especially the Atlantic trade routes, become stronger, and thus traders were induced confidently and boldly to send their ships and cargoes to sea, so that the country's byword became 'business as usual.' Save only on the North Sea, which had been sown by the Germans with contact explosive mines, trading vessels were given every encouragement to ply as of yore. A number of fast merchant vessels, fitted out and armed in British naval arsenals, were commissioned by the Admiralty, and these acted as patrols, while the Grand Fleet itself sought to encounter the ships of the enemy. But the German Fleet, like Bre'er Rabbit, 'lay low an' sed nuffin !'

Although there had been no great naval sea fights up till the end of October, the stirring engagement that took place in the Bight of Heligoland early on the morning of the 28th August, when a squadron of the British Fleet attacked a German squadron, deserves to rank as one of the most daring and successful exploits of the modern Navy, and served to show the stern sort of stuff the men of Admiral Jellicoe's command are made of.

Reconstructing and conjoining the official

reports of the fight, an excellent idea is got of its nature. The preliminary official report laconically remarked upon the fact that 'a certain liveliness is apparent in the southern area of the North Sea.' The fight itself arose from a concerted operation of some consequence attempted against the Germans. A strong force of destroyers, supported by light cruisers and battle-cruisers, and working in conjunction with submarines, intercepted and attacked the German destroyers and cruisers guarding the approaches to the German coast. The operation, in the words of the official despatch, was 'fortunate and fruitful.' The British destroyers were heavily engaged with the enemy's destroyers. All the British destroyers kept afloat, and returned to port in good order.

The principal part was played by the light-armoured cruiser *Arethusa*, which carried the broad pennant of Commodore Tyrwhitt, commanding the flotillas of the First Fleet. 'The principle of the operation,' the official report explained, 'was a scooping movement by a strong force of destroyers, headed by the *Arethusa*, to cut the German light craft from

home, and engage them at leisure in the open sea. The *Arethusa*, leading the line of destroyers, was first attacked by two German cruisers, and was sharply engaged for thirty-five minutes at a range of about 3000 yards, with the result that she sustained some damage and casualties, but drove off the two German cruisers, one of which she seriously injured with her 6-inch guns. Later in the morning she engaged at intervals two other German vessels, who were encountered in the confused fighting which followed, and in company with the *Fearless* and the Light Cruiser Squadron, contributed to the sinking of the cruiser *Mainz*.

‘In these encounters the *Arethusa*’s speed was reduced to ten knots, and many of her guns were disabled, and at one o’clock she was about to be attacked by two other cruisers of the German “town” class, when the Battle Cruiser Squadron most opportunely arrived and pursued and sank these new antagonists. The armoured protection, speed, and fighting qualities of the *Arethusa* class have now been vindicated, and this is satisfactory in view of the fact that a large number

of these valuable and unique vessels will join the Fleet in the next few months. Although only two of the enemy's destroyers were actually observed to sink, most of the eighteen or twenty boats rounded up and attacked were well punished, and only saved themselves by scattered flight. The superior gun power and strength of the British destroyers, ship for ship, was conclusively demonstrated.

'The destroyers themselves did not hesitate to engage the enemy's cruisers, both with guns and torpedoes, with hardihood, and two of them, the *Laurel* and *Liberty*, got knocked about in the process. . . . The British destroyers exposed themselves to considerable risk in endeavouring to save as many as possible of the drowning German sailors. The British officers present vouch for the fact that German officers were observed firing at their own men in the water with pistols, and that several were shot before their eyes under these peculiar circumstances.

'The destroyer *Defender* was actually picking up wounded with her boats when she was driven off by the approach of another German cruiser, and had to leave two of her boats,

containing one officer and nine men, behind. It was feared that these had been made prisoners, but, happily, Submarine E4 arrived, and brought the British party home. As it was not possible to accommodate these thirty Germans in the submarine, they were allowed to return to Germany in the boat under the charge of an Ober-Lieutenant, who was unwounded.

‘The complement of the five German vessels known to have been sunk aggregated about 1200 officers and men, all of whom, with the exception of at least thirty, and about 300 wounded and unwounded prisoners, perished; and besides those there is the loss which must have been suffered on board the German torpedo boats and other cruisers which did not sink during the action. The total British casualties amounted to sixty-nine killed and wounded, among whom must, however, be included killed two officers of exceptional merit—Lieutenant-Commander Nigel K. W. Barttelot and Lieutenant Eric W. P. Westmacott. All the British ships will be fit for service in a week or ten days, but the success of this operation was due in the first instance

to the information brought to the Admiralty by the submarine officers, who have during the past three weeks shown extraordinary daring and enterprise in penetrating their enemy's waters. The First Lord has telegraphed to the American Ambassador at Berlin, desiring him to inform Grand Admiral von Tirpitz that his son has been saved, and is unwounded.'

The British Bluejackets came through their ordeal with characteristic pluck and gallantry. 'We went out,' a Scottish naval officer wrote home afterwards, 'not knowing what we were going to do. . . . I kept the morning watch, and at eight o'clock we started going into action. . . . We started by going at two destroyers, who, of course, ran like hares, and we soon lost them. It was misty, and we did not know what we were going to meet, so we had to stay at our quarters, and soon afterwards we caught one of their cruisers. She also ran, but eventually we got her, and simply knocked her to pieces. After her fire was silenced we passed close to her, and she was in a terrible state, and sank an hour afterwards. We left a ship to take off the survivors,

and there were not many, I am afraid. Then the battle cruiser dashed in and went off after some more. We followed, and were soon in action again on both sides. By the time we engaged the one on the port side there was not much left of her, and I believe she soon sank, and nobody was saved. The one on the other side we engaged at a very long range, and I believe we hit her. Anyhow she fled. . . . It was a pretty exciting day. We finished about half-past two.'

Throughout the whole stirring time, while the cannon roared and chaos seemed to reign, the mascot of one of the British ships, a little black kitten, sat under the foremost gun and licked herself contentedly.

CHAPTER VII

LIBELS AND LOSSES

THE commanding officers concerned in the Heligoland fight were Rear-Admiral Beatty, Moore, and Christian, and Commodores Keys, Tyrwhitt, and Goodenough. The German official account of the engagement

paid a tribute to the British, who, 'without stopping to consider their own danger, sent out lifeboats in order to save our men.' The German Minister at Copenhagen publicly made a statement to the effect that German officers did not, as had been reported from Britain, fire upon swimming German sailors after the fight, but that the British themselves fired upon the German swimmers.

This libel upon the men of the fleet the Admiralty at once denied. 'When the German destroyer V187 was sinking,' this denial reported, 'the *Goshawk* ordered the British destroyers to cease fire, and those in the vicinity to lower their boats to pick up survivors, many of whom had jumped overboard some time previously. An officer in the afterpart of V187 thereupon trained the after gun on the *Goshawk*, and fired at her at a range of about 200 yards, hitting her in the ward room, under the impression probably that the boat's crew intended to board and capture his vessel, whose colours were still flying. It was necessary to destroy V187's after gun, which was done with a few well placed shots, after which every effort was

made to save life until a German cruiser of the *Stettin* class appeared on the scene out of the mist and opened a heavy fire on the British destroyers and their boats. The destroyers were forced to retire in order to avoid destruction.'

Among the many humane deeds performed, under great risk, by the British was one outstanding act. The *Defender*, which had drifted some distance from her boats, came under very heavy fire, and her commanding officer, to save the ship, in accordance with orders he received to retire, abandoned his two boats, containing an officer and nine men, and many prisoners. This scene was witnessed through his periscope by the commanding officer of Submarine E4, who proceeded to attack the cruiser, but the latter altered her course to the northward before the submarine could be brought within range. After covering the retreat of the destroyer for some little time, E4 returned to the boats and removed the British officers and men and a German officer, a chief petty officer, and one man. The commander might have taken the other German officer and six unwounded men prisoners, but

as the boats contained eighteen very badly wounded Germans, he humanely left the officer and men to take care of them and navigate the boats. Before leaving, he saw that the boats were provided with water, biscuits, and a compass. He gave the officer the position and the course to Heligoland. The officers and men of the *Defender*, while waiting for relief, stripped themselves of everything but their trousers, tearing up their clothes to serve as bandages for the wounded Germans.

The first happening of note to any of the units of the British Fleet was the sinking of H.M.S. *Amphion* on the 5th August, with a loss of 131 men. The *Amphion* had been proceeding to carry out what the official account characterised as a 'certain pre-arranged plan of search' when the German mine-layer, *Königin Luise*, was sighted, chased by four destroyers, and in about an hour's time was rounded up and sunk by H.M.S. *Lance*. The *Amphion* struck the fatal mine upon returning from the completion of her work. A sheet of flame, according to the official report, instantly enveloped the bridge, which rendered the captain insensible, and

he fell on to the fore and aft bridge. As soon as he recovered consciousness he ran to the engine-room to stop the engines, which were still going at revolutions for 20 knots. As all the fore part was on fire, it proved impossible to reach the bridge or to flood the fore magazine. The ship's back appeared to be broken, and she was already settling down by the bows. All efforts were therefore directed towards placing the wounded in a place of safety in case of explosion, and towards getting her in tow by the stern. By the time the destroyers closed it was clearly time to abandon ship. The men fell in for this purpose with the same composure that had marked their behaviour throughout. All was done without hurry or confusion, and twenty minutes after the mine was struck the men, officers, and captain left the ship, which shortly afterwards disappeared beneath the waves.

The *Amphion* was the leader of the Third Destroyer Flotilla. She was a ship of 3440 tons.

On the morning of the 3rd September, H.M.S. *Speedy*, a torpedo gunboat of 810 tons,

also struck a mine and sank in the North Sea. Previous to the disaster the *Speedy* had rescued the crew of the steam drifter *Linsdell*. Many merchant ships were sunk by those contact mines—a new thing in warfare which, the First Lord of the Admiralty said, deserved attentive consideration by all the nations of the civilised world. At last it was found necessary to take measures of reprisal, and on the 2nd October it was announced that the British Government had authorised a mine-laying policy in the North Sea as a counter-measure to the German policy.

Sir Percy Scott has predicted that the submarine would prove the doom of the modern battleship. His prophecy was daring, coming, as it did, from such a recognised authority upon naval warfare, and it has provided material for hot controversy. Submarines have played a most important part in the war. As engines of destruction they have been particularly deadly, and have been used to effect by both the British and the German Fleets. On the 9th August, one of the Cruiser Squadrons of the British Main Fleet was attacked by German submarines.

None of the British ships was damaged, but the German submarine U15 was sunk.

The day previous the Admiralty had announced that strong and numerous squadrons and flotillas had made a complete sweep of the North Sea up to and into the Heligoland Bight, but no German ship of any kind was to be seen at sea. The sinking of the German submarine was the result of a capital piece of gunnery off Heligoland on the part of H.M.S. *Birmingham*, which shattered the periscope of the enemy's ship, and, having thus blinded her, raked her with well directed shot and ripped out her conning-tower. On the 5th September, H.M.S. *Pathfinder*, the leader of one of the patrol flotillas, a light cruiser of 2940 tons, was sunk by the German submarine, U21, about twenty miles off the east coast of Scotland. The unlucky ship foundered very rapidly, and 259 lives were lost. So terrible was the explosion that the *Pathfinder* was practically blown to pieces in four minutes.

The 22nd September was a particularly tragic day. Three British Third Class Cruisers, H.M.S. *Aboukir*, H.M.S. *Cressy*, and H.M.S. *Hogue*, were sunk in the North Sea by the

German submarine U9. The *Aboukir* was first torpedoed, and the other two were standing by to render assistance when they met the same fate. Whether more than one German submarine was sunk on the occasion is debatable. The loss of life was large. Many heroic deeds were performed by the British officers and crews, who behaved with splendid courage. In commenting upon the loss of the cruisers, the Admiralty stated that the sinking of the *Aboukir* was, of course, an ordinary hazard of patrolling duty. The *Hogue* and the *Cressy* were sunk because they stopped, endeavouring to save life, thus presenting an easy and certain target to further submarine attacks. The Admiralty, therefore, pointed out for future guidance that the conditions which prevail when one vessel of a squadron is injured in a mine field or is exposed to submarine attack are analogous to those which occur in an action, and that the rule of leaving disabled ships to their own resources is applicable.

The British second-class cruiser *Hawke* was sunk in the North Sea, off Peterhead, by a German submarine on the 15th October. The

British ship sank in a few minutes. The survivors cruised about in open boats for five hours before being rescued. One of them at least had escaped from the *Hogue* the previous month, when she was similarly sunk. On the 1st November it was intimated that the protected cruiser *Hermes* had been sunk by a torpedo from a German submarine in the Straits of Dover. The cruiser floated for three-quarters of an hour before finally heeling over and sinking. So much for the losses to Admiral Jellicoe's fleet.

The catalogue of damage done to the German Fleet by that controlled by the British Commander-in-Chief is quite satisfactory. Good work was done by H.M.S. *Highflyer* in the South Atlantic by sinking the armed merchant cruiser *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*. This vessel had been endeavouring to arrest traffic between Britain and the Cape, and was one of the very few armed auxiliary cruisers which had succeeded in getting to sea. 'Bravo! you have rendered a service not only to Britain, but to the peaceful commerce of the world,' was the laudatory message despatched by the Admiralty to the *Highflyer*. In the Heligoland Bight fight the German losses, as already

indicated, comprised the light cruisers *Mainz*, *Ariadne*, and *Koln*, and two destroyers. A daring exploit was that of the British submarine E9, which, on the 13th September, made a dash to a point six miles off Heligoland and succeeded in sinking the German cruiser *Hela*. The submarine, in making for home again, was in imminent peril, but skilful seamanship brought her back to Harwich.

On the 6th October, the German torpedo boat destroyer S126 was sunk off the Ems River by British submarine E9, the vessel which had already sunk the *Hela*. The exploit was brilliant, and the presence of two German submarines which arrived on the scene almost immediately rendered the escape of E9 all the more hazardous. But it was skilfully accomplished.

Quite a Nelson touch was imparted to the venture of H.M.S. *Undaunted*, a light cruiser which, on the 17th October, engaged and sank four German destroyers off the Dutch coast. The *Undaunted* was accompanied by four destroyers, H.M.S. *Lance*, H.M.S. *Lennox*, H.M.S. *Legion*, and H.M.S. *Loyal*. This was the *Undaunted's* first engagement, and she

was a sister ship to the *Arethusa* which had also given a good account of herself in her maiden commission. 'The Germans,' an eye-witness told a correspondent of *The Times*, 'fought like heroes, but they were outmanœuvred and outmatched by superior gunnery.'

Captain Fox of the *Undaunted*, who had been captain of the *Amphion* when she was sunk by a German mine, is reported to have described the success of his work in two characteristically laconic telegrams: (1) 'Am pursuing four German destroyers;' (2) 'Sunk the lot.' No more graphic description of what proved to be a short but a hot fight could have been penned. One sailor, describing the fight, remarked with a fine air of tragic comedy that 'when the last destroyer was sunk they left not so much as a flag behind for us to carry home as a memento!' In the determined fighting along the Belgian coast towards the end of October a strong naval contingent lent valuable aid in bombarding the German positions. German submarine attacks were finely repulsed, and more than one German ship went to her doom.

CHAPTER VIII

PERSONALIA

IN 1902, Sir John married Florence Gwendoline, daughter of Sir Charles Cayzer, first Baronet of Gartmore, Perthshire, formerly M.P. for Barrow-in-Furness, widely known as a British shipping magnate, being partner of the Clan Line of steamships. None is prouder of the gallant Admiral than Lady Jellicoe, who has always taken a keen and an active interest in the work of her distinguished husband, and has endeared herself to all ranks of the fleet in consequence. The family consists of four daughters: Gwendoline Lucy Constance Rushworth, born in 1903; Myrtle Grace Brocas, born on the 28th August, 1908; Norah Beryl Cayzer, born on the 30th March, 1910; and Prudence Katherine Patton, born in 1913.

With his brother-in-law, Rear-Admiral Madden, his Chief of the Staff, he is in complete accord. They have both been close personal friends for years, and completely understand

each other's ways of working. The Rear-Admiral also has four children. His wife is also a daughter of Sir Charles Cayzer.

One of the men of Devon relates that when Jellicoe joined the *Centurion* he remarked that he wanted a smart ship. A smart ship meant a smart ship's company and smart gunnery. And smart gunnery meant the procuring of smart ones and twos. He is a firm believer in temperance, and, speaking at Gibraltar some time ago, he is reported to have said: 'As regards straight shooting it is every one's experience that abstinence is necessary for the highest efficiency,' and to have quoted with approval the statement of Captain Ogilvy (a noted gunnery instructor) that the shooting efficiency of the men was proved by careful and prolonged tests to be 30 per cent. worse after the issue of the rum ration than before it, the ration being only one-eighth of a pint.

Admiral Jellicoe has a deep-rooted, sincere admiration for the great sister service. In the fore part of September, 1914, he sent two congratulatory telegrams to the Continental seat of war: (1) To Field-Marshal Sir John French:—'The officers and men of the Grand

Fleet beg that you will convey to their comrades of the British Army their intense admiration for the magnificent fight they have made and their warm congratulations on their recent successes.' (2) To General Joffre :—'The officers and men of the British Grand Fleet beg to tender their warmest congratulations to their comrades of the Allied French Army on their recent successes.' Commenting upon the messages, a naval journal drew attention to the use of the phrase, 'the Grand Fleet,' and pertinently asked if this indicated the Admiralty's decision to drop the title Home Fleet.

The suggestion for a change of nomenclature was made by Mr Archibald Hurd in the pages of the *Fortnightly Review* in July. 'If,' said the writer, 'the British Admiralty would run a pen through the title "Home Fleets," as it appears in each Navy List, and substitute the words "Grand Fleet," no little service would be done in promoting the highest Imperial cause. This great force would embrace all the principal ships kept in commission or in reserve, and would thus include not only the vessels in the North Sea, but those

detached as occasion required for duty in the Mediterranean or the Pacific. . . . The present title "Home Fleets" cloaks the strategic principle which the Admiralty not only preaches, but practises, as the history of the disposition of His Majesty's ships, with which the people of the dominions are unfamiliar, amply proves.'

Writing in the organ of the Navy League, *The Navy*, Mr Arnold White draws a parallel between Admiral Jellicoe and his great predecessor, Lord Nelson, the hero of Trafalgar, both of whom, the writer shows, possess courage, tenderness, patriotism, and devotion. 'But for Jellicoe,' the article proceeds, 'news would have been received now of the annihilation of our Mediterranean Fleet. Germany would have made herself mistress of Malta. Malta has always been held by the mistress of the seas. But for Jellicoe, Germany would have compelled Italy to declare war on Britain. But for Jellicoe, Germany, Austria, and Italy would have conveyed Turkish, German, Austrian, and Italian troops to Egypt. Communications with India would have been cut, the eastern red route would have been

blocked, the Suez Canal would have been seized, Gibraltar would have been invested, and British power in the Far East, Middle East, and Near East would have been totally eliminated. In the gray waters of the North Sea Jellicoe is repeating the lessons which Nelson taught to the navies of the world in his long vigil in the Gulf of Lyons.'

The parallel between the two Admirals affords the editor of the sailors' magazine, *Chart and Compass*, the opportunity for an interesting anecdote of the China War. 'In all our great sailors—pre-eminently personified in Nelson—the lion and the lamb, a strong hand, and a big kind heart are,' says the writer, 'wonderfully blended. Nelson united and loved his men, never lost sight of the humblest of his sailors, so with Jellicoe. Here is an incident which illustrates this fact—When Admiral Jellicoe nearly lost the number of his mess in the China War by a bullet passing in about an inch or so above his lung, my friend's son, Adams by name, helped to carry him aboard. Did he ever lose sight of Adams? Not a bit of it. He always found him out, at last spoke for him, and

Adams to-day is the proud carpenter of the King's Royal Yacht. But here is the tale out of school—Admiral Jellicoe visited Portsmouth not long ago, sought his old sailor friend. He said "You know, Adams, I don't care about being up in London, at the Admiralty, like a fish out of water, I would sooner be at sea! When they give me command again I shall take you with me." "Now, look here, sir, you got me a good berth, I am satisfied, I don't want to leave, but if you say I must, I will." This is Nelson all over, it's the human kindness combined with the lion strength of victory, which binds men with ropes of steel to their officers. The pet names the sailors call "Jack Jellicoe" are absolutely refreshing to the heart. It all means—with such union of heart and hand—when the opportunity comes—death or victory.'

It is typical of Admiral Jellicoe's habit of personal attention to all matters affecting the comfort and good care of his men that he found time to write a personal letter on the 29th September, 1914, amid all the worry of watching a wily enemy, to the British and Foreign

Sailors' Society, accepting the position of vice-president of that excellent organisation. 'I am sure,' he wrote, 'that the homes and institutions all over the world are the greatest possible boon to sailors, and I wish the society every success in the future in the work which has been so thoroughly carried out in the past.' When in command at Weymouth, Admiral Jellicoe, attended by his staff and other naval officers, opened an additional room in the society's building for the use of his men. It was significant that this was called the 'quiet room,' where the sailor could read his chart, say his prayer, write to a loved one in his little haven of peace. The Admiral, like the mighty sailors before him and of to-day, believes both in the Bible and Prayer.

And in the beginning of October, 1914, amid all the worry and anxiety of drawing out schemes for still keeping the German Fleet in check, he yet found time to send home an appeal for winter comforts for his men of the fo'c'sle. 'Hell-fire Jack' is the sobriquet he has been given by his crew. But his heart is in the right place, and though his steel

nerves serve him in excellent stead when duty has to be done and an enemy of his country requires to be crushed, he has earned the confidence of all, from the First Lord of the Admiralty to the smallest midshipman, by his cheery optimism, his firm confidence, his originality of thought, his promptness of action, and his approachability and willingness to listen to all with legitimate business to speak about. In short, he is a typical British sailor.

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